GREGORY

WINNING AND HOLDING
— IN ADVERTISING AND SELLING

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WINNING AND HOLDING
— IN ADVERTISING AND SELLING

By

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THE DEVIN-ADAIR COMPANY

NEW YORK

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WINNING AND HOLDING
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WINNING AND HOLDING

CHAPTER 1

ON THE INSIDE LOOKING IN

Entering the advertising profession from outside arenas of writing may churn up all sorts of reactions. The present writer "broke into" the agency field blandly supposing he would enjoy an edge on his new colleagues because he was a "writer." That spasm of dementia lasted fully forty-eight hours. And it is with respect to its complete and painless cure that he ventures here to set down some of his experiences.

Copy was what he proposed to do for his outfit—and to do big. He wasn't, it is true, so bumptious as to think writing advertising copy a soft job. But he'd been swinging a more or less respected pen through various areas of editorial space for many years; and he was quite prepared to dip it into new wells of admiration. That was a good few years ago. He's still, though chastened, with the same agency. He continues to dip the pen; but there's scarcely a man or boy among his 150 associates from whom he hasn't been glad to borrow ink.

Now that's extraordinary, if you like. For, outside the

copy department, only a handful of these associates are trained writers. And though a third of the agency's personnel has had college or technical school experience, not every one perhaps, even of these, could do a sustained piece of writing. But with regard to constructive criticism, which is so many tenths of advertising writing that the original modicum is almost lost sight of, this upstart writer could get points from virtually every person in the shop. In short, his pen did not find itself until a hundred other hands closed with his on the shaft; his copy was not copy until he turned it into tracings of the merchandising wisdom with which his associates were saturated.

His first instructors were the account handlers. These were smart young men—even he realized that. College men for the most part. They deferred to him as a "writer"—very suavely and very disingenuously. That was part of their game. Soon he began to come croppers: as a "writer," mind you. One of these executives to whom he offered a piece of copy murmured, with his finger on a certain paragraph: "That's dangerously near litotes, isn't it?" Litotes! From a business man! Flabbergasted, the copy writer sought his coop to meditate on that triumph of insulation—the academic live wire.

Another account handler soft-soaped him to the ears, manœuvred him into a corner and drawled: "This allusion, now, to capillary attraction—just what do you understand by capillary attraction?" And gravelled

him! He'd been using sonorously a term of which he could report, when challenged, no more than that it had something to do with a hair!

"Do you think 'his every aim' is impeccable English?" gently objected still another of these learned go-getters; and he rubbed another bruise. So on, up and down the line. The space-buyer nailed him one day with a sly demand for the etymology of "demijohn." (Look that one up yourself before you take your next pull at one.) These chaps weren't baiting a new copy writer. They weren't philanthropically plugging gaps in his education. They weren't merely helping to get out better copy. Actually, they were themselves *writing* copy. It was a literal "laying on of hands" for the greater glory of their commercial alma mater and the broader business of its clients.

So much for just the English of it. When it came to copy as copy—the fine points of advertising writing—what this "literary" man learned of his genial coadjutors would burst the boards of a very corpulent book. Perhaps it's enough to say on this score that he's still learning.

Speaking broadly, what most impressed him in modern advertising practice as represented by the agency he has the honor to serve, is its superlative exhaustiveness. Such combing of records, such grubbing for facts! The word "meticulous" was coined to cover it. Comparatively, working up a doctor's thesis is child's play.

Before a line of advertising is written, months, sometimes years, are spent investigating every conceivable problem involved. Hundreds of thousands of words are compiled. Questionnaires are broadcast. The average layman, who conceives copy as "the idle pastime of a summer day," would be aghast at the volume and intricacy of the study exacted before copy is even approached. It is (to divert an H. G. Wells title) literally *The Research Magnificent.*

And when the callboy knocks on the copy writer's door, the same exhaustive care remains the cue. Winston Churchill is supposed to have rewritten *Richard Carvel* eleven times. That's piffling. Advertisements rewritten twenty times have been recorded. That advertisement you skim idly enough in print, and to the composition of which you would allot perhaps a half-hour's work, probably has behind it multiplied revises and rewrites, thousands of dollars in high-priced time, and a trade investigation that covered weeks!

All to what end? you interject. Or did, some years ago. Nowadays, most people concede the power of Advertising. But how tremendous that power is, what manner of scepter the agency may sway, you could not fully realize unless you were clinging to its stalwart arm. Magic, no less! The advertising agency can create financial empires, found great dynasties, supplant the ideals of generations. Few fictional romances hold the thrill one gets from delving in these imperial archives.

Take one story. Time, 1917. A mill building of no great size. Two men with a dream—and $4,000 to spend on advertising. The limping little account selected an agency. Today, there's a plant of thirty buildings covering over twenty-five acres, doing an annual business of more than $12,000,000. And this prodigy was achieved almost exclusively by advertising. Page the spook of Harun-al-Rashid!

Another practical pipe-dream from the same agency's annals. Just a laboratory experiment! Today, 80 per cent distribution among all retailers who sell varnish—the largest shelf distribution of any varnish in America. Accomplished by advertising cunningly spliced with wise merchandising policies.

From zero to the third largest distribution among retail grocers of any trade-marked product is another of these advertising miracles. Up to 1906, this product had been a slow-selling specialty, of limited geographical distribution, with the good-will accretions of age. Today, it is one of the most successful specialties in America. Advertising! Plus a radical change, worked out by the agency, in selling and sampling policies. For Advertising today, of course, involves the agency's participation in the client's whole corporate activity.

Captains of industry—the clients. And justly so-called. But behind the scenes is the advertising agency. What rank? Generalissimo, declares this "litry" man. And few of the captains, he imagines, dispute it.

CHAPTER 2

ADVERTISING WEIGHS THE LITERARY MAN

You've met him, the Literary Man in Advertising. You copy chiefs have engaged him. He is a ruddy fact. Just how many distinguished literati are now eating regularly by virtue of agency jobs one can only surmise; but that there are not a few of them I deduce from my own experience. During a single fortnight I had applications for a copy writer's berth from three such: one a novelist with three quite decently successful novels back of him; the second also a novelist and short-story writer who startled the critics a few years ago with a first book of strong promise; the third, a poet and essayist of national reputation. All three in *Who's Who* and all three hungry—for an agency connection.

Make no mistake, then. The Literary Man is getting in; has got in. But—is he any darned good? Can he write marketable advertising copy? Does Advertising, in short, want him?

Yes, Advertising wants the Literary Man if—

Let's admit it. There *are* disabilities. Risks, too. Taking on a Literary Man may involve either. For not only is advertising writing a special order of writing but the

copy writer's temperament—how many literary men possess that? And how few can assume it! Why? Because prime copy writers must have the salesman-temperament and the average literary man is the world's most deplorable salesman.

No need, here, to elaborate the thesis which sets off advertising writing from writing. That axiom, however, locks no doors—hermetically. The literary man *can* square his style and imagery with commercial necessity. But how to implant the salesman instinct if it isn't there—that's the problem which has whitened many a copy chief's head the while it reddened his overhead.

"Missed it again," grumbles the chief as he lays down a piece of copy perfectly Englished and perfectly futile. Punch? Of course it has punch—as a piece of nervous, forceful writing. But copy must have that specialized punch known as Salespunch. There's one *selling* sales argument that the facts channel for each piece of copy. A score of "locations" for it: granted. But only one argument. And without that argument there's no swift-flowing current to the advertisement. The "literary" paddle too often merely roils up the shallows.

"Well, now that I've borne with your dogma thus far," you explode, "what's the answer? Got a remedy?"

Not wrapped-up! But I believe there *are* literary men who can make live copy writers; and I believe there's a way to tell the dynamo from the dud. Incidentally,

don't make the mistake of hailing the literary man as a salesman because he can sell himself to you. Even when there's nothing else in the world he can sell, he'll not fall down on that assignment. But what you must do is to comb his work for the *literary equivalent of sales-punch* it may contain.

Does that sound nonsensical? Think it over. Novel, essay, poem—each must have one trenchant argument prescribed by the material, or it will miss its mark. That's not so different from advertising copy, is it? And the pace and tenacity displayed in hewing to this line, the restraint, the "fit," of the style, are just so many fibers of the divining rod you're being privileged to suspend over the literary man's potential copyhood. Nor do you need to read much of his stuff. Qualities that might illuminate for you the novel or the poem will inform the paragraph or the verse. Suppose you encountered, for example, the following stanza in a candidate's portfolio:

> The swarthy bee is a buccaneer,
> A burly velveted rover;
> He loves the booming wind in his ear
> As he sails the seas of clover.

Not every business man, and not every poet either, knows that the author of those lines did, some years ago, present himself as a candidate for a copy job, and did write copy for a well-known agency. Would you

have engaged him on the strength of the lines quoted? Would you have felt that they held literary salespunch? Could you indeed have escaped the conviction that that stanza is actually a perfect advertisement—the finest advertisement for the bee ever written or conceived?

That poet had latent but unmistakable commercial salespunch. He proved it in his famous "Vision of Better Roads" written for Tarvia—than which perhaps no advertisement ever printed blends more deftly sheer literature with mere commerce. Do you remember it? May I quote a few lines:

What did the teamster see
In old days, driving his heavy loads
From farm to town, over hills and prairies,
Through mud and flood and storm and washout,
By wood-roads and highroads and the great National Highways from State to State,
His strong horses straining and sweating through dust or mire—
What did that hardy teamster see
On those long, hard roads behind his laboring team?
Across the years he saw a vision,
Prophetic, happy, haunting and inspired—
A Vision of Better Roads in the days that were to be.

Not bad copy writing, that. And by a Literary Man! No, I'll not say who, because subsequently he returned to his first love, Mere Literature. But his name is that of one of the first flight of North American poets.

CHAPTER 3

THEORY—"THAT GOLDEN MAZE"

"The purpose of an advertisement is to make you product-conscious *at the moment of reading* and send you out to buy that product *the next moment.*"

Bang, went the copy chief's fist on the table about which lounged a group of more or less attentive miscellaneous advertising men. He glared round the circle with the disturbed eye of the man who hopes he hasn't said more than he can support.

"That ought to settle the question," observed the man at his left, releasing a smile of the sweetest tolerance.

"Who would dare go to the mat with so inspired an oracle?" added another.

"Certainly," chimed in a third, "no one of us merely practical birds."

The chief smote the table again. He knew the value of thumps to bolster up dogma.

"Now listen, you fellows, I'm serious——"

"Sorry to hear that," drawled a man who had not yet spoken, "for then you're ripe for the alienists. Listen to *me*. If your statement were true the advertising agency would have to shut up shop."

"Wait a minute, now," countered the copy pundit, whose mind had been racing ahead anticipatively, "I know all you're going to say. You're going to assert that no advertisement does or can do any such thing. That advertisers aren't entitled to expect any such miracle to happen. That the advertising agent who preached such doctrine would be riding for a fall—and a blizzardy winter on top of it. That advertising is oversold anyhow——"

"Quite so," interrupted the malcontent, "and largely because of such sweeping claims as the one you just made."

"But," said the copy man, who now believed he saw light ahead and could save his thesis by a little astute trimming, "I'm absolutely with you on all the counts I've stated for you so generously. And if I had said, 'The *function* of an advertisement is to send you out instanter to buy,' you'd have a right to crown me. What I did say was, the *purpose*. And there's all the difference in the world."

"Hair-splitting," sniffed the other. "Keep it 'purpose,' if you like; and I'll retort with, 'The purpose of advertising is to create a state of mind that will ultimately'—"

"Ah, but now you're misquoting me," impatiently broke in the copy manipulator. "I didn't say 'the purpose of advertising' but 'the purpose of an advertisement.' What you have in mind is a campaign, what I'm

talking about is a single advertisement, an individual advertisement, and as to that single advertisement, not the advertisement as we know it and find it, but the *ideal* advertisement. *Theoretically,* the purpose of the advertisement is to do just what I may have appeared to say advertising actually did perform and was performing—and you can't see that there's a bad gap between those two interpretations."

"Well, why not say 'ideal,' then?" barked the objector. "I congratulate you on the formula. My outfit can't write that kind."

"Imagine," went on the copy man, ignoring this swipe, "imagine an advertiser with money enough for only one advertisement. If he could put into that advertisement sufficient pull, lure or black magic to make every reader rush out and buy he would have achieved what I call the 'ideal,' and you perhaps the 'impossible,' advertisement; but, whatever either of us calls it, that's the kind of advertisement at which that particular man would and must aim. And the nearer that ideal is approached (granting that human fallibility denies its achievement) the more wisely his money will have been spent."

For the first time, the copy man waited in vain for a rebutting answer. So novel and intoxicating was this experience that he presently continued with all the stops out:

"Don't you fellows agree that there's oodles of hokum

spread over this whole question of what an advertisement is? Our high-hat avoidance of the idea of over-the-counter immediacy in connection with an advertisement partakes of, if it doesn't reek with, attitude. Let's dress the whole matter up, if we like, with some such parade costume as, 'An advertisement aims to create a state of mind that will gradually, etc., etc.'; but let's not ignore the fact that this definition is a pretty lame makeshift. It's the definition that the failure to achieve the 'ideal' has brought us down to. What we should like to do if we could is—well, let's see, how did that statement of mine go?—

" 'The purpose of an advertisement is to make you product-conscious *at the moment of reading* and send you out to buy that product *the next moment.*'

"If you slap 'theoretically' in front of that motto you square it with the well-known mournful facts—but you deliberately vitiate that 'counsel of perfection' which no advertising man ought to think is bunk. Q. E. D."

"All very pretty," said the argumentative one, as the group arose to disperse, "but who's going to turn out that kind of advertisement? You, maybe?—as I hinted before."

There was impolite laughter. The copy chief banged the table, for the third time. But before he could get wound up again his audience had melted away.

"Anyhow," he mused, "I had the last thump."

CHAPTER 4

GIVE YOUR PEN SOME OUTSIDE EXERCISE

What copy writers should read for the good of their souls and of their craftsmanship has received much attention. Textbooks on advertising propose not only themselves, but also a regimen of collateral reading of a cultural nature. In the files of advertising magazines you will find recommendations ranging from Socrates to Shelley. And stress is placed on the high practical desirability of this kind of reading, although it may have no direct bearing on the copy job.

Canny advertising men do not quarrel with this advice.

But why do we never hear the proposal that copy writers should *write* as well as read outside of advertising copy—toward the same end of increasing their efficiency in copy? Why is it tacitly accepted that a man can improve the health of his work by broadening and diversifying his collateral-reading diet, yet keep his pen in condition on advertising copy only? How can you better affiliate general reading with special writing than by filtering it through general writing? In short, is there anything wrong with the following thesis except that you don't hear it every day?—

You can't get the best copy out of the practice of reading assorted literature unless you practice assorted writing along with it.

There's been a lot of crooked thinking along this theoretically straight line. And one of the reasons is, I suggest, the copy writer's tendency to compartmentize. Even as to his reading, it's necessary at first to sell him the idea that he can transfer technique from an essay or a poem into an advertisement. He has, you see, always compartmentized: "classics" in one cage, advertisements in another. That split, as I've said, is now pretty well healed. A fusion that results in the smelting of better copy—and that need not incidentally let literary taste grow cold—has taken or is taking place.

But when it comes to writing, the copy writer writes nothing but advertisements.

Another quirk of the twisted thinking back of this condition is that the average copy writer thinks of copy exclusively as copy—advertising copy, merchandising copy. That, of course, primarily it is; but it is, in addition, poetry, philosophy, fiction, satire, drama; it is Park Avenue, Wall Street, Broadway, Bowery, Brooklyn, Bronx; it is logic, it is froth; it is jazz, fugue, grand opera; it is imagism, it is horse sense; it is Château Yquem, it is bootleg; it is a cream-puff, a doughnut, a lady-finger, a pretzel; it is just bread. In short, the gamut of copy is equal to the sum of all the kinds of

writing and all the kinds of speech extant in the world today—and then some.

Yet the copy writer goes on writing nothing but advertisements.

The strangest feature of this phenomenon is that copy writers recruited from other fields of writing—reporters, editors, even novelists—too frequently write thereafter nothing but advertisements. Deliberately, wilfully, nothing but advertisements. And alas, demonstrably nothing but advertisements. Or, if they do write outside, they compartmentize—and, blind to the constructive interrelation of fiction (say) and advertising copy, turn out fiction that cries for a dose of copy-value and advertisements that "holler" for the imaginative touch. Never seems to occur to them to mix up the two *métiers*.

A well-known agency man, ex-short story writer, told me that he found it necessary to keep up his reading but that his "literary" style had been "shot to pieces" by several years of copy writing. That's a sample. You've heard the same specious bunk. Why not adapt the style, mister? But no. What this chap had tried to do was to discriminate literary style and copy writing—to the detriment, I imagine, not alone of the style. If his general reading could be utilized toward improving his copy, why not his general writing? A trained writer failing to use his training because he

thought that advertising copy and literary work were two things—quite incompatible!

More excuse, then, you'll say, for the man who has never written outside. Granted. But he won't erect excuses if he can be sold on the value to his copy of practice in apparently unrelated lines of writing. And of course I'm dodging the vexed question: Should a copy writer attempt to juggle outside writing and copy writing with an eye on the professional rewards of both? That's another load of poles. The thing can be done. The thing has been done. You remember the couplet,

> "Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
> Scots, wham *Bruce* has aften led."

But I'm *not* to be led into that tempting by-path. My point is simply, practice in all kinds of writing makes for better copy writing; my advice, practice ye, practice ye, oh neophytes!

Well, what at?

Blanket answer: Everything.

What, writing poetry?

Righto (let's call it verse).

What good is that?

Elementary. Take sonnet, rondeau or ballade. Just so many lines to each (to stress the most superficial aspect). Your thought must therefore be contained within narrow limits. It must be presented complete within those limits. It must be proportioned soundly.

And it must crack the whip. Brevity, conciseness, balance, climax. . . . Not so different from an advertisement.

Moreover, seeking rhymes is a jolly good way to make a self-acting Thesaurus out of your mind. Then, too, after you've ground out a sonnet or two and got "kiss-bliss," "life-strife," "love-above" out of your system, you'll find yourself reaching for fresh and ever fresher words, squashing the *clichés* as fast as they shamble out of their moth-bags.

Not so far off good advertising theory.

Mind you, this is strictly utilitarian stuff. Leaves out the spirit-liberating effects of the study of good literary models. Your reading takes care of that—but *it doesn't take care of your copy, too!* If you doubt that statement, try writing an advertisement after reading poetry for an hour and then after putting in an hour trying to *write* poetry. Perhaps your attempt will net no more than a drunken-looking, bat-eared, lopsided quatrain—but you will have discarded so many ideas, dallied with so many ingenuities, started humming so many mental wires you didn't know you possessed, that when you tackle the advertisement you'll be astonished at the ease, the freshness and the imaginative versatility that come running out of their power-houses.

Thus all down—or up—the line. Dialogues—the old Greeks would have made bang-up copy writers. (Memo to account handler: I've assigned Mr. Plato to cover

your Athens (Ga.) dealer campaign with dialogue leads. Wow!) And they'll make good copy writers of *you*. But don't just read 'em and let it go at that. Pick out some homely controversial subject and then turn yourself into Mr. Hammer who chucks his version at Mr. Tong's head or at Mrs. Hammer's. Get your characters wrangling, scoring off each other, convincing each other, all the while talking as real people talk when they're just expressing themselves. And your next piece of dialogue copy will read less like the manufacturer talking to the manufacturer's own shadow.

(It seems hardly necessary to drop in here the caution that these recommendations are for pursuit outside of business hours. There are employers, maybe even copy chiefs, who would look with scant favor on exercise of this kind during office time. But the same admonition would apply to your general reading.)

Fiction, now. The tyro's most helpful henchman. What vistas open up before the pair of you working together! . . . The trouble with the average advertisement is that it has only two dimensions. Like the page it's printed on, it possesses only length and breadth—and sometimes, indeed, lacks the latter. But depth, background; life, movement—Dimensions No. 3 and No. 4—where are they? These qualities teem in good fiction and can be transplanted. How can a piece of copy, that starts cold from merchandise scratch, accept the pace of an advertisement which enjoys the flying start of a fic-

tion-coached imaginative lead, and expect to pull up at point-of-sale in anything but a winded condition? Yet that's what happens usually to the copy of the man who writes—and thinks he's writing—nothing but advertisements. That writer who, on the other hand, has practiced writing fiction with the view of improving his copy, won't start at merchandise scratch. His fiction models didn't. Not they. So he, too, will "beat the pistol." He'll work up a perspective. He'll plot out his message. He'll think his advertisement in terms of *depth*. He'll experiment with overtones. He'll get a heart-warming, muscle-lubricating head-start. In short, though the advertisement may be the baldest kind of selling prose, though the only character in it may be played by a broom handle, that advertisement will have depth in it and movement and life.

And what about dramatic writing? Try it. Sketch out a little scene. Or a monologue. Pretend that a hard-boiled manager will pass on it. Every line in it, then, *must* "get over," be wholly natural, belong inevitably to the speaker; every bit of action and business must score —and score in an ascending curve. No entrances and exits that don't strictly "relate," not an excess-baggage word or step or sit. Moreover, no self-conscious glances toward the audience. Spontaneity. You have your mental eye on the audience, of course, and on the box-office beyond—but *not while you're writing* (*and vicariously acting*) *your piece.*

Then: pitch into that conversational lead which has been baffling you. Why, hello, I've just written it! Same mechanic, same salutary restrictions, same formula of power—and, by George, the same hard-boiled audience to keep a fellow on his toes. Whoop! It's a pipe, now. Never got so much life into my stuff. Why didn't I ever try this stunt before?

One could go on almost indefinitely spinning similar analogies. Enough, perhaps, in these jottings to bring out the point—and maybe induce some skeptics to try a little sampling.

CHAPTER 5

BE FAIR TO THE CLIENT!

You've heard of him. The "cantankerous" client. Agency executives will tell you all about him. He just can't keep his hands off the job he has nominally turned over to *them!* He just can't let them alone! Hampered by his untrained interference, are they to blame if the horsepower oozes away before it reaches the rear wheels? How can the tyro in advertising expect anything but disaster if he continually and adversely criticizes the professional?

"On the face of it," argues the agency man (under breath), "you, Mr. Client, have chosen us to direct your advertising because you believe we know how to direct advertising. If you thought you knew advertising as well as we, you would sew on your own buttons. By engaging us, you admit that we know and you don't. You have, in short, selected us as qualified experts. Why not, then, let us function as experts? You wouldn't think of treating any other acknowledged expert as you do us. What your physician or your lawyer prescribes you perform, without question. Yet on certain formulas and details of advertising policy, with which you are as

unfamiliar probably as with medical or legal practice, you argue and nag and haggle to a fare-ye-well!"

Now, before we press the agency man to grant that this tirade may be not all truth, let's see if we can't induce the client to confess that it isn't all error.

Stands to reason, doesn't it, that the trained man must produce less than his best results if checked and reversed by the untrained man? Correspondingly, the advertising agency equipped with such trained men cannot give 100 per cent service to the client who insists on his own layman opinion. Indeed, all that the irate agency man was permitted to say above would probably be indorsed—up to a certain point—by any fair-minded man. For we're discussing only the well-equipped progressive agency, whose systematically secured and systematically applicable experience naturally outweighs the experience of the client. That the agency's judgment, therefore, should take precedence, seems to follow.

Let's admit, now—not to set up for assault a man of straw—that in general the agency *is* given this precedence, again up to a certain point. In matters such as yoking effectively advertising policy with merchandising policy, or such as research, general copy slant, and selection of mediums, the wise client usually hands over the reins. But with respect to specific copy, to art and layout, his hand is apt to snatch!

And it is of course precisely with respect to copy, art and layout that the agency man is most touchy.

Why?

Isn't the answer to this "Why" a defense at least as sound for the client as for the agency?

Isn't it, in effect, simply this: That copy, art and layout are intangibles, opinion; that, actually, *there are no positive criteria for judging them in advance?* Doesn't it follow, then, that the client's judgment is often as good as that of the trained agency man; that he senses this fact; and that—most serious indictment of all—he realizes, and instinctively seeks to redress, the agency man's own conscious uncertainty?

Let Mr. Client speak for himself now:

"That physician-lawyer analogy is as false as it is stale. Of course we follow *them* blindly. But mark this, medicine and law are approximately exact sciences with accepted definite rules. Their diagnoses in general have been proved up. Advertising, we admit, is at least in sight of this class as to research, choice of plan and selection of mediums. But that advertising can be called an exact science in the departments of copy, art and layout we don't believe any more than do you yourself, Mr. Agency Expert! Because you don't, we don't; and because neither of us does, it's any man's opinion. Where there are neither universally accepted rules nor positive precedents, our guess is just as likely to split the

core as yours is. For in copy, layout and art *you are guessing too!"*

And that *might* seem to be that!

There is, however, another analogy which may help to harmonize this discord. For a fairer estimate of that aspect of advertising which embraces the intangibles, why not compare with it what Christopher Morley once called "the Boblishing Business" (with its side-kick the Drama)? Publishers' spectacles—that's what we need. For what criteria have publishers? Wouldn't they tell you, none at all? They would—with tears or with expletives. Eventual best sellers put on their lists with a doubtful shrug or the courage of despair! Conversely, the masterpiece before which they lay down their souls and their dollars, petering out at 1,000 copies! When it was not until *David Harum* had been offered to eighteen or twenty publishers that one of them accepted what had then become a joke, should you say that the several hundred thousand copies to which that novel promptly soared represented the curve of an exact science?

Similarly with stage success or failure. Loud derision chased the manuscript of *Abie's Irish Rose* from one manager's office to another until the author herself elected to produce it and nonchalantly to pocket the $5,000,000 or so this play has earned to date. (We are not here concerned, of course, with intrinsic art; but "Will it sell?" is a question quite as important to the

publisher and the dramatic producer as it is to the manufacturer, the merchant or the advertising agency.)

Back to our muttons, now, with this new carving-knife. Isn't it mournfully true that sometimes the piece of copy that is destined to cop the flag limps to the starting-line without a sou laid on it? Or that a masterly sketch, backed to win every purse in sight, is left ignominiously at the post? There's not a shred of sense in denying that not only do such things occur but that the client knows they occur. Why, then, shouldn't he register healthy doubt?

Now don't run away with the idea that all copy and art successes are just fool's luck. Indeed, I would stake a copy writer's dollar—and that's faith—that there are far fewer failures in advertising than in either publishing or producing. Nor, even alongside the more exact sciences of medicine and law would advertising make so contemptible a showing. But what must be maintained, it appears to me, is that the so-called intangibles are at bottom theory and will by definition so remain; that there are no absolute criteria for them, any more than for other creative and imaginative bids for popular acceptance—and that there never *will* be any absolute criteria for them, at least until "tested" results and conference room decisions function reciprocally!

Where, then, are we "at"? Are copy, layout and art to degenerate into a tangle of clashing guesses? If these intangibles cannot by their nature in advance be ironed

out under specific rules; and if, by *human* nature, one man will continue to believe that his judgment rates as good as the next fellow's—if these things are true what's to prevent agency man and client from continuing to "see double"?

Two things, I submit: one a contribution by the client, the other a concession by the agency man. Fair enough, isn't it? Fifty-fifty numerically, anyhow; and the man who won't listen to a give-and-take proposal finds generally that in the end it's he who gives and the other who takes.

The client first, then. By the very fact that he interposes his own opinion he admits that some conjecture must, at least occasionally, enter into the intangibles of advertising. Very well: let him refrain from impeaching his own particular agent for what that agent cannot help. It's scarcely fair to assert, by one's own interference, that advertising must be in certain aspects less than an exact science, and then rail at the advertising expert if the partnership cannot make an exact science of it. Even the doctor or the lawyer doesn't score a straight string of hits. If, then, the client adjusts himself to this certainly reasonable view, he may discover both that his relationship with the agency is much smoother and that there haven't been so many misses after all.

For it is presumed that he has chosen his agency with discernment—that the agency is of the well-

equipped type to which we agreed to confine this discussion. Obviously, personnel has much to do with diminishing these theoretical hazards. Grant that positive prophecy cannot enter, it yet stands to reason that the agency which commands high and tested imaginative brain-power will chalk up the greatest number of wins. Just as the publishing house best equipped with this commodity will list the most best sellers.

Let the client, having by choice of an agency with a proved record or its equivalent in brain-power discounted all but the irreducible minimum of possible mistakes, accept that minimum equably when it does occur and not keep insisting that it oughtn't to occur!

In return for this concession what is the agency man to do? Why, give up dogmatizing! Take and hold the lead, of course, where concrete experience gives him the acknowledged bulge; but, on the intangibles, forget that he is the "expert." His insistence here may stall the motor quite as calamitously as the client's interference —and not necessarily because either is glaringly or fundamentally wrong. No, it's simply that this petty kind of friction will eventually undermine that mutual confidence without which no team can put in its best licks.

Instead, therefore, of fretting and fuming at the client's interpolations let the agency executive welcome, encourage, *demand* them. Two heads are always better than one even if one belongs to an expert! Show the

client that you do not resent his criticisms or even patronizingly and superciliously endure them. Make it plain, on the contrary, that you want him to "speak out in meeting"—that while salvation may not depend on it, fatter dividends may and a healthier and more confident team-play certainly does. And make him see the wisdom of this co-ordination, lest he think you're just a weak wabbler with no mind of your own. This danger you can easily avert by pointing out (1) the fact that an untrained hunch is occasionally as good as a trained punch; and (2) the ease and celerity with which agreement can be reached when one party is not attempting to dragoon the other.

On this second point there might be debate. Wouldn't this "open forum" open the door to endless bickering and probably deadlock? Good sense, it would seem, says "No"; although if, through that discussion which the client is too timid or too magnanimous to fasten on your manifest distaste for parley, a better piece of copy could have been evolved, even a little fraternal bloodshed wouldn't be a prohibitive price to pay. But in practice the frank interchange of opinion will speed up the production of really first-rate work. For when the agent crowds his conclusions down a reluctant throat, they will not only set up subsequent irritation there, but will probably be ejected when a final O.K. is desired. That means a grave loss of time that

could have been averted by swapping symptoms and agreeing on palliatives at the outset.

It's really a case, isn't it, for old Doctor Tact? If the client realizes you honestly want his opinion he is liable not only to pay more deference to yours but to cease from interjecting the possibly half-baked criticisms which the contrariety of human nature now induces him to set up against your cocksureness.

Let both agent and client, then, agree to disagree freely when the free territory of the intangibles must be invaded. Invidious competition between two sane men pulling for a common goal is absurd. Stop worrying about precedence or dignity; give vanity a year off. What difference does it make who thought what, when "what" may sport a record-breaking dollar mark in front of it and trail behind it the exclamation points of a popular success.

Get down to brass tacks—and let the client bring his own hammer to the conference.

CHAPTER 6

AFTER ALL, PEOPLE TALK THAT WAY

I met once, somewhere, in the review of a certain popular novel, a priceless phrase: "The author knows the danger of writing too well." That half-disdainful, half-wistful comment, outrageously true, snares in its taut dragnet advertising copy as well as fiction. Indeed, copy it delimits even more ruthlessly; for while an author may defy it and sneeringly accept the decimation of his audience, the advertising writer must acquire and please *every* reader.

Now that doesn't mean bad writing, smashed syntax and puerile Pollyannotations. But it does mean, as I see it, salting occasionally your copy with those colloquial, banal *clichés* of everyday use that the average man swallows with relish because to him they taste like home-cooking. Take, for example, the frequently disparaged phrases, "Of course" and "After all." Weak, lazy, inept! Irrational! A misdemeanor to use them anywhere, a crime to begin with them sentence or paragraph. But —wait a minute, now!

Grant that, from the point of view of a precisian, the critic of these and like phrases is not far off 99.9% right.

Economy, grace, fastidious English—all are glitteringly back of him. But can advertising copy—can indeed any *genre* of writing that must feed on popular acceptance—be held in general to the rigid ideal? Are not in fact such phrases precisely the locutions which tend to humanize copy—and therefore to swell its salability? In short, won't people who talk like that be pleased to be talked to like that? Is there a higher order of salesmanship than handing your prospect his own lingo? What is more rational than fitting a smooth irrationality to minds which do not snuggle up instinctively to the rational?

Getting back to our figure: "Of course" and "After all" are not only savory tidbits at any stage of the meal but they are *bully* appetizers. Whet the common-or-kitchen appetite like magic. Off comes the guest's coat! He'll go through your entire menu, now. Starting paragraphs with these phrases not only dishes up the most tempting viands first but wins the reluctant or diffident trencherman as surely as "Please pass the gravy" takes the curse off having a Professor of Sanskrit to dinner.

Then, too, these two phrases are often vital to the sense—and consolidate it most strongly at the beginning of sentence or paragraph. If you could count the number of times they lead off in ordinary conversation and then tot up how many times they seemed inevitable in their context, you would get not only a staggering total for the first classification but probably the

same total for the second! That you would simply be unable to rule those phrases off people's lips may be a vulnerable reason for sticking them into copy; but that you can't make fluent headway in conversation without using them is a whacking *good* reason.

Oh yes, it's possible to paraphrase. You can avoid "Of course" and "After all" by using "It is true," "Obviously," "In the last analysis," etc. But isn't that cure worse than the disease, particularly since the disease is worth a million dollars to the practitioners who treat it homœopathically? Take the first sentence of this paragraph of mine. Wouldn't the natural thing to say have been, "Of course, it's possible to paraphrase"? Wouldn't that provide both the strongest phrase possible in the context and the strongest place to put it?

Finally, when you serve up "Of course" or "After all" you are offering to the reader a supreme proof of your reliance on his judgment. There's no better signature to an all-cards-face-up attitude. "Of course," contradictorily enough, does not always claim everything. Usually, it is faintly adversative, as, "Of course, *Omnipot* cannot be used on ormolu." Honest fellow you are, runs the reader's comment. Likewise, "After all" hands your case over to him. Even when these phrases are bumptiously assertive (as, "Of course it's *Omnipot*" or "After all, what would life be without *Omnipot?*"), he'll go with you on their crest because that's how he would express his own conviction, were he like you

lucky enough to handle a product that couldn't be beat.

No, the precisian won't sell as many goods with his finicking copy as will the chap who compromises with his audience on a basis of what terminological garniture the average reader likes with his food. Too often, copy, aiming at the ultimate of correctness, becomes "faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null."

CHAPTER 7

COPY THAT SPREADS THE WINGS OF POETRY

A certain college freshman rather fancied himself as a poet. A coming poet. Perhaps the coming poet. He *was* facile. Rhymes sprayed from his brain like sparks from a pinwheel. His thoughts danced to imperious rhythms. He could even order ham and eggs metrically. When his father, upon reading one of his early effusions, exclaimed, "Why, this boy may one day be a John Greenleaf Whittier," he felt that the old gentleman had indeed the right idea, although privately he himself thought that transcending *Whittier* would be child's play. The pater meant to be complimentary, no doubt, but—

To such a boy Freshman Rhetoric would naturally be confining. A good course but—pedestrian. With Jovian condescension he attended the futile lectures and wrote the childish themes. But his heart wasn't in it. So, one day, he sprang a surprise. The weekly impromptu writing-test was called. You "did" a theme, on any subject, in class—under the professorial eye. Fifty minutes for the job. All right. He—the young Keats—would show his stuff. Why not a poem? No rule against it,

was there?—although the exercise was of course supposed to be a prose composition.

He would do it.

Mentally, at 1,200 revolutions a minute, he sketched a little plot, decided on a heroic couplet scheme, pulled down his vest and launched his soul into the infinite.

At the end of the period he'd compiled, in a complete story, about a hundred verses—and felt Miltonic.

Next class the instructor returned the themes.

The young Chaucer found his paper superscribed: "This is a straight prose course. Rewrite."

"Philistine," fumed the poet. "Zero he gives me for what may some day be hailed as an immortal effort. Just because it's poetry he probably didn't so much as read it. I could have been as lyrical as I wanted if I hadn't broken my story up into verse-lengths. He would have approved my stuff if it had been just poetic prose. Whoop! *There's* an idea. Why disaffect thousands of low-brow readers by strutting in meter when you can be just as ecstatic in prose and get away with it?"

Then and there a Goethe was interred and an advertising copy writer was born.

Now the foregoing is not as fantastic as it sounds. For though Advertising would be nominated by most people as the straightest of "straight prose courses," there's good warrant for the statement that authentic poetry does masquerade in the prosaic garb of many an advertisement. And more than that, it's at least argu-

able that without that surge and resurge of poetic content no advertisement can be great.

. . . . . .

Smithers, the veteran account handler, was tearing his hair. *You* might have thought he was just scratching his head, and indeed there wasn't much hair to rend. But to Withers, the copy chief, his performance had but the one significance: Despair.

"That fellow Blithers you got in your department," opened-up the distracted account executive, "isn't worth the powder it'd take to give him a good shave. Here I send you a layout that's the opportunity of a lifetime. Picture of a motorcar tearing a fifty-mile-an-hour strip off the landscape. Driver's face all lighted up with the glory and the rapture of that pace. Gosh, man, it's a headlong thing, that illustration. And what has your copy writer done to it? Oh, I know Blithers is the automobile expert, but he never *drove* more than twelve miles an hour the way he writes, and this piece cries for sixty!"

"Wait a minute, now," cautioned the chief, "we're not selling speed but shock absorbers."

Smithers contributed a snort.

"Really?" he said. "Has it never occurred to you that you gotta sell *readability* before you can hope to sell any product by advertising? And that when you start selling the attributes of a product right off the reel you'll not be able to *give away* the indispensable commodity of readability?"

"Oh, yes, I'm with you there," wearily responded the chief, "but your illustration speaks for itself, startles and attracts on its own hook. Why paint the lily? If your picture wasn't such a humdinger—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Smithers, impatiently. "I know all you're gonna say. And I'm not recommending talking about the picture, explaining the picture. It's all a question of key. Leave the picture alone, but don't drop your voice a whole octave. Don't come down from an allegro into a dead march in the next bar. Some transition into shock absorbers sufficiently lively to link picture and product we *gotta* have—or the effect is simply ridiculous."

"I'm afraid," lamely began the chief.

"That's just it," said Smithers. "You're afraid of putting anything into copy that sounds like ecstasy, like poetry. You keep saying, 'We gotta sell shock absorbers,' and then look at me as if I were telling you not to sell shock absorbers. Man alive, try selling your readers a little gusto, a little atmosphere, a little aërial fervor and fancy—and you'll find they'll not be half so likely to leave your shop without a set of absorbers as if you bash 'em over the head with the product in the first paragraph."

"Poetry in the advertisement," mused the copy chief, when Smithers had withdrawn from his office chewing the last word as if it were a succulent piece of gum. "Something in what old Smithers says. Won't apply to

every advertisement, of course. But we *are* too timid. We permit ourselves to be hogtied by the fear of appearing eloquent and florid. Too often we're the airship that attains a speed of a mile a minute on the runway but can't get up into the air. And that's a satisfactory performance for any vehicle except an airship. Hmm. Poetry. Old Smithers sometimes says a mouthful."

Still ruminating, Withers reached behind him and took down a book of proofs. An old memory was teasing him. Hadn't he seen an advertisement once that struck him as pretty nearly a model of the poetic distensibility of a selling message? An advertisement that was itself a poem—yet, as he recalled the facts, had proved the best puller in a series of highly extracting advertisements? He found himself leafing over the ancient book excitedly. Ah, here it was:

> . . . a "High Court of Precision" where a lens may be brought before the Supreme Master Set. This impressive trial takes place in a darkened room. A peculiar light from a vacuum tube flutters behind a screen. As the doubtful lens comes into contact with the Supreme Lens, all at once, and mysteriously, circles of soft light spring forth. If the two lenses differ by 1/100,000 of an inch a telltale ring appears. The inconceivably small error shines out unmistakably. . . .
>
> That miraculous thing called Sight still holds its mysteries. Scientists are tracing light waves and mind energy to their meeting point. They are finding a new thing—that mind energy is similar to light energy. Will they eventually discover that mind is captive light?

"By George," murmured Withers. "Some rhapsody to that. Airplane stuff if I ever heard a propeller. 'Mind is captive light'—what poet ever had a nobler, a more essentially lyrical, concept? And there it is, in a sales talk: and one that sold a ton of goods! Poetry in the advertisement? Well, say! Old Smithers gets on the target now and then. Let's see about this shock absorber ad, now. Isn't there some high-powered metaphysic? . . . 'Captive light.' . . . Eie, what price Spenser and Marlowe, Heine and Schiller? Could *they* have so superlatively fused inspiration and salesmanship, vision and market analysis, poetry and punch?"

. . . . . .

Smithers O. K.'d the shock absorber revise—with loud cheers.

CHAPTER 8

THE PRONUNCIATION PITFALL

That morning I'd seen the announcement in my newspaper—and grinned at it over a jorum of coffee.

"'Manger,' eh? Good name for a hotel that can boast a crack cuisine," I reflected, shamelessly embracing the pun which was making crude overtures to me.

"But no," immediately I scuttled the flippant suggestion. "That's too subtle—and only people who knew French would get it, anyhow. Wait a minute though—"

Quite frankly now I giggled—a reprehensible breakfast *faux pas*. Another pun was bearing down on me with open arms. And this one spoke English.

"Why cross the pond," I demanded of my somewhat bored-looking spouse, "for a sophisticated interpretation when a perfectly good one is at hand in perfectly good English? Without doubt this hotel caters to a horse-show clientele."

And I displayed to her the advertisement of the new Hotel Manger.

Well, she snubbed, of course, my ill-timed wheeze, and wouldn't even unbend when placatively I went back and trotted out pun Number One.

"No," she said, with that literal treatment of such flights of fancy that is certainly the best way to exterminate them—and their author, too, "no, that is the man's name. The owner, you know. It isn't the French for 'eat,' darling, and it isn't a stable, either. Really. And what's more, it's not pronounced either of those ways."

"You seem to know a lot about it," I growled.

"Went there to tea yesterday with Aline," airily she replied.

"Well, how do you pronounce it? I can think of about eighteen different ways. There's those two I suggested, 'Manger,' French, and 'Manger' in English, word meaning 'trough'—"

"And 'Manjer,' short 'a,' and 'Manger,' long 'a' and hard 'g,' " she taunted.

"Then," I cried, "German 'Mahng-er,' Long-g Island 'Mang-ger' and 'Mahng-ger'—oh, a whole raft."

"Yes," she summed up, "but you haven't got it yet. The name *is* probably of German origin, but it's been Americanized with the American short 'a'—the word's pronounced as if it rhymed with 'hanger' and you roam all over the map and take down every dictionary but the right one—ha! ha! Besides punning poisonously and so early in the morning. Oh, must you be starting, sweetheart? Good-by."

That, you would have thought, was defeat enough; but I was all wound up, and pursued the subject violently as my broker friend met me for our daily walk

through the Park in the general direction of Thirty-fourth Street.

Contumacious beggar, that fellow. He promptly took sides with my wife.

"Of course it's pronounced like 'hanger.' Trouble with you is you know—or think you know—too many languages. French and German pronunciations are naturally eliminated. This is New York. People here talk American, don't get balled up as you are because they don't know foreign ways to say it."

"Then the only way it could possibly be pronounced here is like 'hanger,' hey?" I said, perceiving how I could destroy him. "You assert that being in America we've got to talk American, yes?"

"Precisely."

"In other words—let me get you straight, now—play the dog in the m-a-n-g-e-r pronounced like 'hanger'? Huh!"

"Um-m, well," he demurred, looking rather dismantled, "well—"

"If," I went on relentlessly, "we must talk American, then there's only one way to pronounce this new hotel and that's 'Manger'—with the dog in it. You're condemned out of your own mouth."

"Well, maybe," he replied, dying hard and shifting his ground before I could bury him, "but what of it?"

"Simply this. It's just one more example of the folly

of an advertiser selecting a name that can be pronounced more than one way. And this is a particularly malignant example. For, though your point is well taken that only the American language need be considered ordinarily, in this case the appeal is to a wealthy and educated market. The clientele this hotel is after *will* pronounce its name in German, French or English—in other words, any old way. Moreover, even in English, as I was obliged to enlighten you, there are several possibilities. Oh, that name's a lulu. But it's a boomerang, too. A distinct commercial hazard—and for exactly the reason that it can be pronounced variously. Do you see that or must I inject more light?"

"You mean people will pass up the hotel because its name is too hard to pronounce?"

"Well, that's approximating the idea. What will happen is this: Nobody just *seeing* that name knows how to pronounce it. Is he going to make a fool of himself, even before a taxi-driver, by possibly missing the right way a thousand miles? Is he going to *ask* anybody how to pronounce it and thus proclaim himself a hick? Take a visitor from out of town—and you know how much the New York hotel depends on that baby—who's seen the ad. He arrives in town, would like to try the new hotel. But 'How do you pronounce it?' stops him short. For make no mistake: even excluding French and German there are so many ways to say M-a-n-g-e-r that the veriest illiterate could think up

several. He won't chance it. Cabby laugh at him? Not if he knows it. So he sings out the name of some hotel he can't pronounce any other way."

"Something in that," my friend conceded, "and then there's the word-of-mouth advertising, too. That would be stopped, or at least crippled, for the same reason. Mrs. A., even if she chances to drift in there, isn't going to prattle to Mrs. B. about the glories or the conveniences of the new hostelry unless she's jolly well sure she knows which one of several possible pronunciations is the current one—and that's going to slow up the hotel's acceptance. Yes, you really have got a sort of idea. That name *is* a handicap. But do you suppose the owner was so stuck on his name that he wished it on his hotel in defiance of these risks?"

"Certainly not. He's pronounced his name one way all his life, and so have his friends. Never occurs to him anybody else could be bewildered. He's just been badly advised, or probably not advised at all. If I laid this matter before him he would likely be so grateful he would give me a whopping big interest in the project and call his hotel The Stanley. Then—"

"While you're about it," sardonically broke in my friend, "there's another misnamed product you might regenerate. Exactly the same situation economically, although here there's no foreign language complication. Ever walked on Riverside Drive at night?"

"Plenty times."

"Seen a big electric sign across the river: 'L-I-N-I-T'? How do you pronounce that?"

"Why—er—just exactly what is the product?"

"Oh, no, you don't," he crowed. "Stick to your guns. Your proposition is that you only just *see* the word which may be pronounced more than one way. If you've heard it pronounced or know enough about the product to realize why it must be rendered in one of several ways, the test isn't a fair one. Anyhow, can't you understand I'm indorsing your own point, you poor sap?"

"Oh, yes," I replied heavily. "But I really *ought* to know that name. It's my *own* stupidity is annoying me. However, you're quite right, of course. A swell illustration. Query: is it pronounced 'Line-it' as it ought to be by all the rules of orthoëpy—"

"Rules of *what?"*

"Pardon me—of correct pronunciation. Couldn't be 'Lin-nit,' short 'i,' because when the consonant is doubled the preceding vowel is short. That's what the rule says, doesn't it? Yet I'll bet it *is* 'Lin-nit,' in fact I've a sneaking idea I've heard my wife use that word. But there you are: two clashing pronunciations and—I'm right, am I not?—the incorrect one the correct one!"

"Righto. But it has nothing to do with birds, as you might think. The 'Lin' is from 'Linen.' Kind of starch, I think, that makes a lineny effect. Yet, as you pointed

out with the hotel, here's a manufacturer displays a name that not only can be pronounced two ways, but the way every educated woman would instinctively pronounce it is precisely the way that takes all the starch—I mean, sense and selling punch—out of it."

"Sure," I assented. "You're dead right. Why, if I'd ever seriously thought about it I would have guessed it had something to do with the lining of clothes."

"And you would say, now," continued my friend, "that the woman who merely saw that word, uncertain which way to pronounce it, would never risk laughter or some kind of haughty correction asking for it in a store—"

"Worse than that: probably would never get to know even what the product was!"

"Um-hm," he acquiesced. "Does seem like both these advertisers have thrown up an unnecessary sales resistance. And there are hundreds of others ignorantly in the same fix, no doubt. Why don't you sell these fellows your idea?"

"Oh," I replied spaciously, as Thirty-fourth Street pried us apart and he turned west, "I'd rather *give* it to 'em."

CHAPTER 9

"NOT BAD"

Some years ago, when, with a zest now laid away in lavender, most of the sophisticates of America read *The New York* (morning) *Sun,* a letter was published on that famous, cynical editorial page. It was a naïve effort, honest, bemused.

"Why do you say," bleated the writer, "in such-and-such an editorial, 'Certainly this was not ignoble conduct'?" (The precise words I've forgotten: rough in any you like.) "Why," the yawp continued, "confuse the reader with that 'not ignoble,' when what you're trying to say is just plain 'noble'? Nothing but a silly upstage pose, etc., etc."

"Not at all," blandly, almost gaily, countered the editorial writer. "We did not mean 'noble' and we did mean 'not ignoble.' Syntactically, we admit, it's the same phrase, but in meaning there's all the difference in the world. We can't tell you why. Either you see the difference or you don't. But—take our word for it—it's there!"

All writing—advertising copy not excepted—draws constantly this kind of fire from the literal-minded.

Nuances of meaning are distrusted solely because they are not *perceived*. The recurrent cry, "Write simply," is often the refuge of the man who, because he cannot grasp finely shaded meanings, fails to realize that it's just these effects which brilliantly marry Lure to Logic, and permit the happy pair to set up housekeeping with more sales than accrue to the union of Bald Clarity and Simple Faith.

"What wouldn't I give for a lamp like that!" or "What wouldn't it mean to you to have (one)!" belong to this *genre*. Carp, carp—from the literalists. "You mean," they explode, " 'What *would* I' or 'What *would* it.' " But we don't mean that—not by a mile. The difference between those two "identical" versions is profound; and it's a difference which overwhelmingly favors the negative variant—in force, in fervor and in pace. "What would I" is dull, literal, stodgy, obese; you expect a table of merits, a solemn perpending upon the dubious *quid pro quo*. "What wouldn't I," on the other hand, rejects all idea of *quid pro quo,* strikes the note of yearning, causes the reader to break out all over in a buying rash—in short, is a complete advertisement in itself, without a single added word.

But—if you don't see that difference, you just don't see it, that's all.

This whole matter of oblique presentation, "expressing an affirmative by the negative of its opposite," and

the like, is deeper than the knack of juggling showy figures of speech. It's deeper even than the purpose to make advertising copy more flexible and diversified. It's rock-bottom sales wisdom! For it's perhaps the only way to counteract the growing reader intolerance of threadbare superlatives.

"Best," "amazing," "exquisite"—"most exquisite," "most amazing" (and so on *ad nauseam*), what price such words today? A debased currency, if ever there was one. Squeezed to death! But poor literal-minded Advertising, knowing no alternative, goes on frantically piling them up—with the touching belief, apparently, that these vessels of quondam punch and passion can be recharged if the writer keeps on foaming at the mouth indefinitely. Fallacy, mournful fallacy—and with the remedial truth just round the corner!

"Oh," you interrupt with a giggle, "I know what you're driving at. Ahem! Deliberate understatement, eh? That's how you'd cure the superlativists. Old stuff! Come along through. Exhibit A: 'United States tires are good tires.' And all the rest. Sure. We've heard all that before."

Well, not quite, not quite—although perhaps you couldn't hear it too many times. No, you've forgotten the first part of my little sermon. Understatement certainly falls gratefully, therefore persuasively, on the ear that is deafened by salvos of superlatives. But understatement is a ticklish thing to handle. Bald con-

tinence *can* go unnoticed. Grant that commonplace restraint is better than commonplace rant; but that's not saying that a novel, a "different," manner of couching that restraint wouldn't be better than either.

In short, why not go gunning for a brand of this wholesome understatement that has a fresh and pungent taste to it? Why not do a little exploring among various rhetorical devices which will permit us to ditch the superlatives—yet sidestep the adjacent ditch of banal inaudibility?

I'm just lodging the idea. You can write your own ticket. Some of these tricks have rather haughty names, but you'll find they mix well in any company. They're such modest fellows that everybody likes them, yet so "kind of different" that nobody ever forgets them. And (to try my own prescription) maybe they can't sell goods!

It was once my privilege to present for criticism to Edward MacDowell certain essays in musical composition. I've told the yarn many times, always choosing a credulous audience. Self-preservation, perhaps. Anyhow, I pick instinctively simple souls who are too inexperienced to be bored with or distrustful of superlatives. This must be so because when I approach my climax and prepare to tell them what the great composer said about my work, I struggle with the contemptuous realization that they're going to be disappointed. What their shallow minds are reaching for is

"amazing," "wonderful," "incomparable"! It's borne in on me that there are still people who swallow superlatives.

So it is with the superior feeling that I'm springing on them what all but the very few gullible souls to whom I'm restricted would declare was better than any superlative—it is with this species of proud humility that I seal my story with the maestro's own words.

" 'Not bad,' said MacDowell," says I.

Right here, doubtless, is the place for this article to full-stop. But every copy writer has trained himself to disregard these finer artistic monitions. 'Tisn't safe always to "leave it to the imagination." Even when he's writing to and for other copy writers he can't strip himself of the feeling that there may be some boobs among them. To "sell" my point, then, even at the cost of laboring it:

Substitute "Good" for "Not bad." Equivalent? Literally, yes. Actually, not by leagues. "Good" is impersonal, dry, cold, loose, ultimately non-committal. "Not bad" is a cogent personal indorsement, vital with the impact of its content of critical honesty. "Good" acquiesces genially and vaguely and lets it go at that; "Not bad" has done some *investigating*. "Good," it is true, tears down the flimsy edifice of contestable superlatives, but leaves in its stead a chilly-looking building that no one wants to live in. "Not bad" is the cure that *isn't* worse than the disease, the compromise that saves

the situation, the superlative that is arrestingly and persuasively no superlative at all.

Well, well, my children, either you see it or you don't. Perhaps some of you are screaming inaudibly, "You're right, you're right," while others are whispering, much more resonantly, "Maybe you're not so far wrong at that!"

CHAPTER 10

HOOEY RECALLED FOR CROSS-EXAMINATION

Some time ago a rather meaty little article garnished the weekly menu of a certain periodical.

The point raised by the writer, viz., that the presence of what he called Hooey rendered unconvincing or actively repellent many a piece of advertising copy is a point good to make. But the examples he gave in substantiation appeared to fall into two distinct categories, so that a water-clear definition of the term Hooey was lacking. What I think he was driving at is, however, so sound and discerning that I am here venturing to review certain of these examples, with the idea that, instead of two rather cloudy targets, one—and that one sharply outlined—shall be set up in front of his vigorous straight-shooting.

Take his first example:

> A million miles from care yet just a step from the fringe of the city lies a precious bit of Kentish Coast. It is Montauk Beach.
>
> Restless cohorts of the ocean roll up on crystal beaches, crashing, roaring, pounding—luring the stoutest heart to gay adventure.

Cradled in the hills are natural lakes. On the largest, with access to the sea, slender speedboats, their bows shimmering in flashing spray, will course over a three-mile oval.

This he calls Hooey. But doesn't he mean "fine writing"? Doesn't he condemn it—and, mind you, my thumbs are down too—for qualities of floridity, over-exuberance, gush: qualities that might indeed be classifiable under Hooey but that do not happen to invest the examples which he later pillories. That he himself is not wholly clear in his own mind as to exactly what constitutes Hooey is evident from his next exhibit—again one that falls into the "overwritten" classification and hasn't the essential Hooey attributes that he subsequently brings out. This piece of copy, with his somewhat bewildered comment, runs as follows:

Leaping, shifting, bounding on the courts—or sitting tense, thrilled, excited on the sidelines—whether you win or lose —how delightful after the game to conquer thirst with a cooling beverage. And how doubly delightful when that drink is Mission Orangeade—real fruit juice, healthful, delicious, already sweetened, always ready.

There is nothing wrong (*the critic speaking*) about such copy. It is good writing; perhaps it is too good. I don't know. Perhaps I am terribly unfair in labeling it Hooey.

No, my dear sir, you're simply confused. There were two kinds of Hooey in your mind; and the kind that you eventually arraign is so palpably the real Hooey

that you instinctively resist coupling with it what is merely a mild flirtation with fine writing or fustian.

But later on in the article the author plants his feet on sure ground. Now he's saying something. A clean-cut definition of Hooey emerges; and I begin to hurrah. Here are his two horrible examples:

> "Make a soap as delicious as French soap but not nearly so costly," women begged us.

Also:

> Why do so many marriages fail? Among the causes, according to a famous judge, is the failure of married people to be fastidious about their person after marriage. They let down. They grow careless. They permit such things as dandruff to exist. Embarrassing at its best, it is dangerous and disgusting at its worst and now there is no excuse for it.

There's no fine writing here. The style is clear and compact, the words simple. Yet these fragments are charged to the brim with Hooey, the real Hooey, the Hooey that got the author's back up—and puts mine up in unison. (Conversely, if you'll turn back to the first two quotes you'll find inflated writing indeed but no Hooey in the sense that he primarily means and most virulently dislikes.)

What is this Hooey, then? Analyze the last excerpts. "Women begged us" is the damning clue. The author's wife sniffed at that. She frankly didn't believe that women—or any one woman, for that matter—"begged"

the manufacturer to make a soap as delicious, etc. She brushed that statement aside as a silly fabrication—and her contemptuous gesture brushed the new soap aside also. That "begged" simply didn't ring true, wasn't plausible, insulted the intelligence of all women —was, in short, Hooey.

Now, perhaps, we're getting somewhere. So far Hooey—the real Hooey—would seem to fit into some such definition as: Impudent groundless assumption disguised as honest enthusiasm. That's no miracle of definition and it certainly doesn't cover all the features of Hooey, of even this particular and narrowed aspect of Hooey; but let it serve until we can both tighten it up and (later on) expand it.

The second excerpt now: isn't the same kind of annoying assumption here—annoying because unwarranted, because based on neither facts nor credible psychology? Does the advertiser really expect anyone to believe that dandruff wrecks a lot of marriages? That's the theory he blandly advances. Hooey, shouldn't you say: impertinent baseless assumption? You reject the advertiser's claim because it's muddied over with this irrational nonsense; and probably you'll forever ignore his product.

Coming out a little clearer, isn't it, that definition? Perhaps we might now add to it. Hooey, puerile groundless assumption on the part of the advertiser, based on his evident conviction that all readers are

saps. That feature of the indictment is what got our critic so het up: the apparent naïve certainty of the advertiser that people were all dolts and would swallow the most unchewable absurdity.

Well, I traveled companionably with the author to the end of his trip on the Anti-Hooey Flyer; but when he got off at his station I had a talk with the conductor of the train. No, this wasn't the terminus. He could carry me right across the continent, if I wanted to go that far. So I settled back in my chair to think up further specimens of Hooey, on my own hook. And, streaming past the car window, there, by gosh, was a whole procession of them. On the back of an envelope I jotted down a few of the most flagrant and irritating.

That tea advertisement. *You* know. Blank's Tea: "the first thing you think of" when you go to a strange place, etc., etc. That little ad didn't make me see red as some of the others were later to do, but it scratched my patience pretty meanly. The first thing I think of when I arrive anywhere, hey? So far from that being the case, I don't drink tea, never heard of this brand and am too busy with rooming-clerk, porter and bell-boy to think for quite a long time of anything but what an ass I was ever to leave home. That would probably be an average reaction to this particular Hooey-drenched ad. But suppose you *are* a tea-drinker and *have* heard of Blank's Tea, are you any more

liable to fall for the presumptuous statement that this manufacturer's tea is the first thing you (anybody, everybody) think of at such a time? Even if you're the one man in three who might think first of getting something to drink, the one in thirty who might want it to be tea, and the one in three hundred who might specify the brand of tea, you still might happen not to like Blank's. Hooey, I mused—and how unnecessary. Why on earth couldn't the advertiser have said, "A good thing to think of first"? That could offend no one, could not appear ridiculous, would be ingratiating instead of prejudicial: in short, would be common-sense, sincere advertising instead of Hooey.

As we dived now into a long tunnel I picked up my newspaper and skimmed the advertisements. Ah, here's one that's beautifully relevant: an institutional blurb on the service given by this particular railroad. The porters on this line (I was adjured especially to believe) are unrivaled—absolutely flawless servants because "they have caught the traditions and spirit of the railroad." Hm, pretty; but wait a minute. Wasn't there something in this very paper—? Oh yes, same page, too: "Federation of railroad porters on the eve of a general strike." What a strange coincidence, or perhaps the reporter made a mistake! But outside of that—I reflected as I recalled how "George" had bawled out only a few minutes back a man who'd got the wrong chair—does the railroad actually think that

the traveling public will digest any such piffle, that, in a word, all travelers are saps?

When the tunnel had folded itself up and dropped behind I resumed my cynical adscape study. Ho, there's another one: "Blank (a well-known restaurateur) wants to see you." Warms the cockles of the heart, doesn't it? The personal touch *de luxe*. You are invited to picture the altruistic boniface just inside his door, with hand outstretched in glad welcome, waiting, waiting for *you*. Better look out, he might kiss you. Those Continentals, you know. And how utterly —and rashly—unqualified is that pledge! Not a word as to conditions. Probably won't make a speck of difference whether you've got any money on you or not. . . .

Let's not pile 'em up, however. There are many more specimens of this *genre*. It's the common-or-garden variety, of course—Hooey on its lowest and baldest level. Simply unwarranted assumption dressed up as spontaneous enthusiasm. Clumsily veiled superlatives. Demonstrably false claims postulated on the premise that advertisements are read only by saps.

But there's a much subtler and deadlier type of Hooey—a Hooey which performs indeed precisely the same function and exhibits the same contempt for reader intelligence, but does so *by implication*. I'll treat myself to only two examples, both (for the sake of

impartiality) drawn from the same industry—cigarettes.

The first (not a current advertisement) is simplicity itself. There's no attempt to do anything ornate or flowery, no straining, even, toward sloganic sententiousness. Yet it's Hooey at its most presumptuous, its most poisonous. Here, indeed, I begin to see red. And six words paints that crimson on my retina. There's the slug (name of the brand of cigarettes) and this single line: "Men who think for themselves smoke ——."

Now that kind of thing is either past-masterly, Napoleonic, or it's imbecile—dependent on whether readers *are* saps or aren't. But if they've any analytical instinct at all how can such effrontery as that sell the product? Or even keep it sold among its own so grossly over-flattered friends? For the implication is as plain as it is indefensible, viz., if you smoke any other brand you're not capable of thinking for yourself, are just a spineless boob led by the nose; if you don't smoke this brand you *don't* think for yourself and it's doubtful if you think at all; smoking any other brand stamps you indelibly as either a Caspar Milquetoast or a moron—all of which is, of course, the most arrant Hooey. Any manufacturer who employs this kind of argument may build a towering edifice of sales, but he isn't building soundly and in the long run even the saps will forsake him. Nor does it materially soften the indictment to protest that this advertisement aimed to

counteract the selling tactics of certain other manufacturers; for the man in the street knows little about the internecine war that's going on in the industry, sees and is susceptible to only the single unrelated advertisement.

One other specimen of this implicational Hooey—and I'm through caterwauling.

"Not a cough in a carload." Grand alliteration, catchy anapestic rhythm, superficial convincingness—but Hooey. For here's what it implies: If you smoke any other brand of cigarettes you'll cough your head off; if you smoke ours you'll never cough. Nice. But—are we asked to believe that a man with a membranous tickle in his "bronikal" tubes wouldn't cough if he were smoking or had smoked this brand? Or, conversely, that a man who never got a cold in his life would begin coughing if he switched from this to some other brand? Is it indeed not almost implied that if you have a cough—of any sort according to the slogan—you can cure it instanter by smoking this cigarette?

Tie-up and conclusion: Hooey is inadmissible to the courts of scrupulous advertising because it hits competitors below the belt by assuming for the product values that aren't there; and it's bad business because (first) it doesn't fool nearly so many readers as its perpetrators seem to think, and automatically sours on the specific product those whom it doesn't fool; and

(second) it won't continue indefinitely to please even the readers it pleased first. With that double-barreled discharge I've swung into an indorsement of our critic's diatribe that has all the metal I can put into it.

CHAPTER 11

LEGITIMATE HOOEY

A good deal of anti-Hooey dogma has flowed under the bridge. Myself, I've propelled a billow or two. But Nature always stages a recession after high-water mark has been reached—and this applies as well to the foaming tides of indignation and of reproach. Not that I would withdraw one bucketful from the condemnation of the kind of Hooey that progressive advertising men are committed to wash out; but the danger of any flood of this kind is that it may overwhelm a proper and legitimate use of the device or policy against the abuse of which the waters are launched. There *is* a use of Hooey that stands—and ought to stand—firm against the torrent. In that respect, you might contend that it is therefore by definition not Hooey at all. Yet, although the distinction is a delicate one, I think you'll admit that the use I have in mind belongs unquestionably to the Hooey family—yet is a thoroughly reputable kinsman.

But let's start at scratch. The Hooey whose functioning in some advertising was deplored was defined as: Unwarranted, groundless assumption dressed up as

spontaneous enthusiasm. An example given was: "Men who think for themselves smoke ——." It was submitted that that was bad advertising, since it implied that if you don't smoke this particular brand you *don't* think for yourself. This was Hooey at its worst: the attempt to set up by implication a claim that no reasoning man would find either acceptable or tolerable. There were other brands of Hooey listed and exemplified; but the main Hooey-thread that ran through them all was this: The advertiser's attempt to force on the public (by implication or by direct, impudent extravagance of statement) a conclusion that couldn't be justified by his product or supported by the psychology even of the credulous man in the street.

Since getting all this off my chest, however, I have thought of a kind of Hooey that is *legitimate*—both good business and defensible ethics, therefore sound advertising. And the next time you pass a florist's window you can read, if you like, a first-rate example of this permissible Hooey:

"Flowers telegraphed to any part of the world," runs this interesting legend.

Taken literally, of course, that advertisement is more than extravagant. It's absurd. It's assumption gone to the head of the class. A foreigner might well wonder what new miracle of transportation had been developed by these amazing Amer-r-icans; and I suppose a million children, at various ages of adolescence, have pondered

that sign and longed to know just how flowers *could* be telegraphed. What condition would they be in when they arrived after being shot along the telegraph wires, has, I've no doubt, scrambled many a youthful mind. Here, then, is a case where the advertiser makes, literally, an impudent exaggeration which must appear, to some minds at least, as Hooey.

But Hooey it is not—in any derogatory sense.

And the reason? Simply this: Because, although it has the color of extravagance and literal impossibility, it actually will and does deliver what it promises. You get all the immediacy of the telegraph, although the precise flowers you choose do not budge from their show-case. The advertisement makes a false use of the analogy of delivering, say, a package of dry goods; but that's eminently legitimate since there's no intention to deceive. It is, in fact, a beautiful example of daring yet basically honest hyperbole, and the man who "created" it was just as true a genius as the inventor of the washing-machine or the author of *Queen Mab*. Come to think of it, probably there's no single-line advertisement in captivity that is so highly charged with imagination and with poetry. "Telegraphing flowers" is indeed a 20th Century poem, complete in itself—Hooey with a ticket to the Seven Seas.

In the same class stands another "cosmic" advertisement. I saw it first in Wm. J. Ryan's theatre ticket office in the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia,

almost twenty years ago. Indeed, Ryan may himself have originated the line. He had the audacity and the necessary touch of arrogance. If he didn't, I should sincerely like to know who did. For it's another "lyrical" bit of Hooey, that annihilates distances, bridges oceans. undertakes to deliver all the kingdoms of the earth. Perhaps you've seen the advertisement without really grasping its volatile magnificence:

"Best seats and boxes in any theatre in the world."

Hooey, yes, for you know quite well that he can sell neither the physical tickets nor the certainty that he can have seats reserved by cable for a performance, say, at the London Haymarket on the particular night you may want. Moreover, you know that not once in a blue moon is any such demand made of him. It's all grandiose showman's extravagance—but it's touched with just that glitter of high imagination and creative audacity that sublimates it, makes it legitimate and artistic and moral Hooey. Actually, it is a new sales philosophy—the apotheosis and justification of the trick it superficially appears to be.

Another example, on a different plane, is "When better automobiles are built, Buick will build them." You don't believe that, however infatuated you may be with the Buick car. That's pure swagger, and the best way to prove it is to offer a Buick owner an even exchange in a Mercedes or a Rolls-Royce. The implication this slogan conveys is not only false as to the

future but it's false now: there *are* better cars being built right today. Yet I hold that this advertisement, while technically Hooey, is legitimate Hooey. The reader does not think of the comparison with Mercedes. His mind adds to this slogan—and was *meant* so to add—cars "in the same price class." Even then, you may say, it's impudent assumption. What right has Buick to claim all the brains? How do they know some other car won't come along and both improve on and undersell them? But I don't read the advertisement that way. To me it simply says, "We'll play fair with our patrons; whatever improvements turn up in the future Buick will be in on; Buick is not going to lag behind; Buick has at least the determination, and we hope the vision, to be always a pioneer."

Moreover, it says all this in an epigrammatic, "inspired" way that takes the Hooey out of it. This advertisement is touched with the poetry of *prophecy:* it's Isaiah where the first two are The Psalms. And you forgive self-deception in a prophet if you're convinced he's sincere.—Legitimate Hooey, I submit.

One more example, with yet another twist. That Prudential advertisement showing the newsboy shivering in a storm, with the legend: "His Father Let His Life Insurance Lapse." That caption won't wash rationally. Why, necessarily, the lapsed life insurance? His father may be very much alive, at home beating his mother over the head with an empty gin bottle. Or

maybe his father died fully insured and his poor distracted mother fell into the hands of sharpers. Moreover, perhaps this toughening, out-door life is the only thing that stands between Our Hero and an untimely extinction. And, on top of all this, didn't most of the current millionaires start life on this level or worse? That lapse in insurance, even granting that that was the cause of his destitution, will probably be the everlasting making of the kid.

No, it's Hooey—except for one thing. And that one thing outweighs all the irrationalities and absurdities I have set down. It is this: *No father, however open his mind may be to the logical defects of the picture, could see his own son in such a fix without an unendurable pang.* That's the touch of inevitable nature that makes this advertisement right, the extravagance legitimate.

In this case the advertiser has invoked the poetry that resides in the fact of paternity. This time it's *New Testament* stuff. Hooey? Not so long as fathers continue to look into their own hearts and transcribe what they find there.

CHAPTER 12

SALES EXPERIENCE FOR THE COPY WRITER?

If advertising is selling—and isn't it?—the most successful advertising man is the best salesman. And the best copy should be written by this same citizen! Doesn't it follow? But how many advertising agencies recruit a majority of their personnel from salesmen's ranks? How many copy chiefs require previous experience in selling? Are not many agencies, in fact, staffed by college men who, lacking such sales experience, are retarded in their development and retard consequently the growth of the agency?

Let's start fair. Let's admit that college men are in general easier to train to advertising than non-college men, if for no other reason than that they have already been subjected to training—and to training of an exact and analytical nature. Let's admit further that, if by advertising we mean advertising copy, there are few college men who can't be trained to write it, and perhaps fewer than 50% of non-college men who can. But—doesn't the college man who has salted away

some sales experience present the ideal blend of trained analyst and trained business-getter? Agencies that realize this and act on it with respect to their contact men are not rare. Yet these very agencies may ignore the rational corollary. *Their copy writers, too!* Are copy writers no better for having had sales experience? Let's see if we can jot down a few reasons that will prove they are—and must be—better.

Mind you, we're starting with the college man—or his equivalent in newspaper or general writing experience. Cases where a salesman untrained in writing has made good in copy are, indeed, not unprecedented. But the average run will, I think, show that such a man will accept the dust of the college-trained writer for about as long a time as that writer in turn will chase another college-trained writer who has enjoyed a novitiate as a salesman. Put it this way. If it takes the first man a year to write good copy, give the second man six months. The third man may be doing it in six days—or six hours.

Those reasons, now:

1. *The approach.* "How on earth shall I begin this ad?" is a question the copy chief seldom if ever hears; but it would take a regiment of figures to total the hours wasted while copy writers are agonizedly putting that question to themselves. Why? Primarily, of course, because they haven't a live mental image of their prospect or prospects, don't "see" their advertisement as a

sales talk with a definite sales objective delivered to a definite purchaser or group of purchasers. In short, because they lack the priceless advantage of being able to start their thinking where the experienced salesman instinctively starts his.

Consider the latter's advantages. He may not indeed have sold the particular product with which the advertisement deals; but he *has* sold real commodities to real people. And he'll make up his mind as to the right line to take and which end of it to seize first while the other fellow is still wondering how to unsnarl himself from the coils of theory.

Now that doesn't necessarily mean that he'll plunge, that he'll play bull-in-the-china-shop. He may; and if he does nine times in ten that will be the cleanest method to handle that particular advertisement. But you book-taught fellows who've been mentally objecting, "What about the 'lead,' the 'intriguing' start, the 'springboard,' the 'oblique presentation,' etc.?" needn't think you've disposed of our salesman-trained craftsman. For he can do those very things and do them better than you can. You don't suppose he made all his sales by socking the prospect on the caput. Crashing in wasn't his sole technique. Nor will it be when he writes advertisements. If he sees that a wary, indirect approach is indicated, he'll write such a lead. But the point is that, because of his practical sales experience, he'll perceive in general the precisely right method to "get into"

that advertisement, and will be off before you other chaps have got into your running trunks.

2. *The close.* Here again the copy writer with sales experience enjoys an edge. For the other chap, once he's finally got going, frequently zooms blindly past the finishing-line out into sterile territory. The salesman copy writer, on the other hand, has learned both when to stop and how to stop—two acutely important lessons. If to make a sale he needed but 200 words he never permitted himself to gamble with 2,000. The same instinct serves him now. Too many copy writers lack "terminal facilities." They don't pad, it is true. They write spiritedly, convincingly. But they carry the reader too far, urge him beyond the point where the sale could have been made.

3. *Hewing to the line.* More important than either approach or close although integrally bound up with both is "sticking to the sales argument." Again I hear protests from the "embroiderers," "atmosphere evokers" and suchlike. Good enough, that kind of thing—so long as every apparent excursus actually feeds the argument. The salesman knows all about that. He may seem to be steering the conversation to baseball, but what he's really doing is nursing it toward his sales objective *by way of* baseball. So with copy writing. The chap with sales experience will seldom take his eye off the sales ball no matter how rashly he may juggle seeming irrelevancies. Many years ago, in

a Vanderbilt Cup road race, Szisz, the Renault entry, during a mix-up at one of the turns, lost the course and reeled off twenty miles at a tangent before he learned his mistake. Some copy writers, unnourished by sales experience, are like that. Ninety miles an hour down a side road!

4. *When and how to put on the pressure.* The salesman knows that, too. But in order to know it he has had to learn something about his prospect. And that's why you'll find the salesman-trained copy writer takes to research more eagerly than the other fellow. He knows by experience that a little scouting beforehand oils the sale. Same with copy writing. Where you'll find the non-salesman writer doing a piece "out of his head," trusting to snap inspiration, you'll catch the other looking up who the readers of the different mediums are, where they live, what they do, and how much they spend. In short, he's out to get a line on his prospect before he tries to sell him.

5. *When to relax the pressure.* Another cardinal point in good copy where the salesman copy writer is apt to "have it on" the other fellow. Call it tact. Call it sensitiveness to prospect-reaction. Call it anything you like. But the "wise" salesman packs it in his kit. And he airs it when he writes a piece of copy. Some friendly, chatty word. A winning half-smile looped in a question-mark. That break into the intimate homely phrase which cushions sledge-hammer facts. The saving let-

down! Where the non-salesman writer—to change the figure—spurs his mount over or past a bewildered victim, the other chap, riding just as brilliantly, senses the moment when by slowing to a walk he can reach out a hand and skillfully land a client in the saddle with him.

CHAPTER 13

ADVERTISING THE ADVERTISING AGENCY

HOW ONE AGENCY ATTACKED THE PROBLEM: A GROUP OF ACTUAL ADVERTISEMENTS

The fact is.

You've met him—the chap who sprinkles his conversation with "The fact is." Perhaps he hasn't any fresh facts to give out. Perhaps he's lined with them. It doesn't matter. You listen to him. For that man has got hold of one of the most compelling words in the language.

The progressive advertising agency, in its clients' advertising, doesn't keep saying "The fact is," although Fact, of course, consistently fortifies the advertisements it prepares.

But commercial fact can carry a sale only so far. Beyond a certain point, facts become both too heavy and too rigid. Few things are sold solely on the excellence of the materials which go into them.

At this stage, then, the progressive agency begins to evoke. The creative product, in such an agency, owes its support and stabilization to research, but it does not

owe its life to research. So far from being documented and pigeonholed by its facts, the creative staff can function, if it chooses, like extemporizers. There's nothing rigid and undeviating to hold them down or back. They can fly.

Facts are their hangar, not their orbit.

This does not mean that they undervalue their facts. Nor does it mean that they aren't constantly gathering new facts. But it does mean that they do not permit facts to write their copy—without the help of a winged imagination.

The fact is as the fact is interpreted.

. . . . . .

"Indebted to his imagination for his facts."

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, famous Irish dramatist and wit, meant no compliment when he released the above shaft. But his epigram can be adapted to modern business—without the satire. Personify the progressive advertising agency. Expand slightly. And you read: "Indebted to his imagination for the interesting, profitable use of his facts."

Could you have a better definition of the successful agency?

. . . . . .

Is that a fact?

Just one of those polite interjections to which nobody ever *expects* an answer! Like "How do you do?" or "What's the good word?"—"Is that a fact?" gilds con-

versation, flatters vanity and—dangles in the air. Perhaps the most futile question in circulation today!

But——

In the progressive advertising agency this question comes to life, insists on an answer—and gets it. Under its searching glare must pass every claim made for every product, every aspect of that claim, every single thread of statement that is stitched into the ultimate commercial fabric. Every word of every advertisement is thus tested—and every step of the research which is the first and natural state of the modern advertisement.

So well is this understood by readers of advertisements that, in the main, the old useless question, *Is That a Fact,* still requires no answer!

This confidence of the public is a mandate laid upon the advertising agency, and by it prized as its brightest jewel.

. . . . . .

Facts! Fancies!

Facts? Of course. The progressive advertising agency couldn't function without them.

And fancies? No, not if you mean vagaries, pipe-dreams, unsupported hunches. Yet——

Though the engine and fuselage of an airplane are facts, they weren't *air* facts until fancy lifted them off the ground.

The sky is the limit for the advertising agency that quickens its facts with imagination.

Stretching the facts for extra bases.

Crack! Dynamite in *that* bat. But where's the ball? The play is complete before the packed thousands spring to their feet. A hot single to short center. Batter tries to stretch it. Second and short converge on the middle sack. Fielded like lightning by center, the ball streaks into the shortstop's glove. All three players go down in a Laocoön tangle. Dust veils the *mêlée*. Like a squat Colossus the umpire bestrides the bag. "Yer out," he bawls.

In the advertising agency line-up, the valuable player never tries to stretch his single fact into a double. Short-lived acclaim may be his, the roar of thoughtless rooters his temporary prize. But he *knows* that, though individual games may be won this way, *pennants are not.* So he pulls up safe at first and waits for the next batter to bring him triumphantly home.

. . . . . .

"I will sing of facts; but there will be some to say that I have invented them."

So poised and balanced, so ringing in tone, so almost lyrical in its effect on you! Yes, an advertisement *can* impress one just that way. Thrill like a fanciful poem. And—sell goods!

But you don't have to "invent" facts to make advertisements that sing. The choir that blends the authentic bass of Industry with the true tenor of Power makes grand music.

Facts do not merely serve art, they frequently *constitute* art.

. . . . . .

"It's just a knack."

"Absolutely."

"Anybody could write an ad."

"A fancy headline—and you got it."

"Those fellows don't care about the facts."

I'll say they don't."

"If you get right down to it, most of the ad writers make up their own facts!"

You've heard such conversations.

Perhaps you've more than half believed the charge. For there's no doubt the versatile copy writer *could* do just that—and do it convincingly.

And this policy would accomplish a lot for the clients of the advertising agency.

Quite so.

A lot in the industrial cemetery.

That's one of the reasons why the progressive agency does *not* invent facts, and also why it remains undisturbed by any such feeble accusation.

. . . . . .

Homely facts—or new-fangled notions?

"Both," answers the progressive advertising agency.

No antithesis, there. *Not* a one-thing-or-the-other clash.

Depends wholly on the market.

Substantial facts served up in homely fashion, all the dishes on the table at once, mother steaming from the dinner-table to the kitchen and back again? Yes, when your market is that kind of market.

Six different forks and spoons, quail *sous cloche* followed by mousse and camembert, and an embroidered butler hovering at your elbow? Right: when you're appealing to *that* kind of market.

The successful agency's attack is *as diverse as its clients' markets.*

. . . . . .

Facts aren't always facts.

When the progressive advertising agency is taking a product apart prior to selling it, hundreds of loose facts are dumped on the laboratory table.

As to each of these, of course, the question, *Is it genuinely a fact?* must be answered affirmatively before the business engine is assembled.

But sometimes an honest enough Yes is actually a disastrous No. A fact that is *speciously* genuine is bolted into a vital part.

The client of a certain agency believed that the way to advertise its product—plated table silver—was to play up its *provable* durability. The agency concurred, but it was decided to send out questionnaires to fortify their joint hunch. Both parties were aghast at the return: 80% of women declared that their major in-

terest lay in pattern beauty and variety, while only 20% elected durability! In face of this indubitable fact——

"What fact?" objected the president of that agency. "Why are you so sure it's a fact? We might have expected just this result—of course, women would vote for pattern first since they believe that *no* plated ware product is going to stand up anyway. They're used to buying plated as a makeshift until they can afford sterling. But you'd never catch 'em voting down *durable* beauty of pattern—which is what we've got to sell. The questionnaire pulled the truth—but it's only a fraction of the whole truth."

He was right, of course—and a fact stood demonstrated as no fact at all!

Unless there's an imaginative eye on that laboratory table you may find, lodged in the very heart of your machine, some "fact" that will blow the product to Kingdom Come!

. . . . . .

Hard facts vs. soft facts.

An advertisement may be as logical as the calendar. It may possess as many facts as there are days to the month. And it may make just as inspiring reading!

For facts can be so hard—so uncompromisingly convincing—that readers instinctively shrink from their impact. It's not disbelief. Not even faint doubt. It's worse than either—from the advertiser's standpoint. It's turn-the-page-before-you-get-a-headache!

But these same facts are susceptible of softer treatment—of a more ingratiating presentation. They are now, intrinsically, no less hard. But they *are* less hard to take. They no longer pound the command at you, Take us or leave us. Before you know it, they have insinuated themselves into your mind.

The advertising agency that realizes *why* the buying public prefers facts soft is the one that *helps clients.*

CHAPTER 14

THE RICHEST SOIL IN THE PHILOLOGICAL UNIVERSE

Captious, perhaps, to pick on the author of "Why Pick on the Poor Copy Writer?" because with so much of what he says every copy chief must be in fiery agreement. "Common language for the common people" (the adjective is his): who would erase that safe and sane selling formula? (Class in copy, all together, now: "I will O. K. that just as it stands.")

Moreover, this genial critic makes a telling point when he says: "Common language is not necessarily the language of fewest syllables so much as it is of limited vocabulary." That's a completed forward pass if ever there was one. Three cheers! Think a moment and you'll admit that the writer who distrusts all long words because they're long is depriving his copy of many words which are firmly lodged in "common" speech. And these long words are just as sweet on the tongue of the "man in the street," just as delightedly rolled off it, as sesquipedalians in the mellow mouth of the pedagogue.

But—somebody must whisper to this doughty crusader that he rather begs the question when he trumpets

"Common language for the common people" as if that were a battle cry against "colorful" words. "Thick" vs. "thin" words (to use his figure) doesn't in the least mean recondite or academic vs. homely or simple words. Those of us who are campaigning to freshen the language of advertising do not (as he seems to imply) advise going outside the "limited vocabulary" of the "common" people. But does that mean for a moment that we are debarred from using "colorful"—"thick"—words? I can answer that question by any one of a hundred phrases which, in themselves, set up proof of my point. Just at random I'll suggest "Not by a winding mile!"

So far from being stripped of "colorful" words if we would talk to the proletarian as he talks, we are privileged to turn up the richest soil in the philological universe. The sidewalk of a great city or the quoit pitch in front of a country store is equally lush to our plow. Homely colloquialisms—whether in one syllable or five—offer themselves in swarms to the acquisitive ear.

And just as many are "thick" as are "thin"!

Isn't it leaning over backward, then, to choose the most ordinary words of ordinary speech when to cull "different" and striking words we don't have to take a single step out of the "limited vocabulary" truck patch? For don't forget that the "limited vocabulary" *cliché*—the stereotyped rubber-stamp word or phrase—is just

as unarresting to the "common" mind as the more sophisticated *cliché* is to the uncommon. You've got to *jolt* both minds!

Listen to the chatter in the subway, to the give-and-take over the counter in the crossroads store. Slang, of course, is a searching factor. Catch-phrases of the moment, another. You'll get material enough from everyday "talk" to spin a thousand advertisements. Rich words! Salty words! Words that are primitively colorful: therefore durably, therefore captivatingly, colorful!

And even if you run out of these "thick uns" you're not licked. For you can transmute the "thin" ones! It's so easy. The trick lies, of course, in laying rude hands on *usage*. Whether for an esoteric, "class" audience or for one composed of "people," you seize attention *most* deftly not by the unusual word but by the "different" or unfamiliar or even (in extreme cases) the wrenched use of the usual word. Many an otherwise "thin" word can be "thickened" by transplanting it from some motheaten phrase into an unfamiliar context. Or old bores of words can be compounded into exciting and memorable strangers. . . .

Have I really anything more to say on this theme?

. . . "Good place to quit," murmurs the cub who never looks over my shoulder except when I'm stuck. "What are you taking a fall out of, now? 'Common language for the common people,' eh? Why, *that's* what you're always raving at us for not giving you!"

CHAPTER 15

SHALL WE INSIST ON FLAWLESS ENGLISH IN ADVERTISING?

Let's admit it's trivial. Petty. Glaringly unimportant when contrasted with the real issues and objectives of advertising.

And then let's deny that it's anything of the sort!

You protest that splitting the short hairs of syntax and spelling is not the job of a strong-arm advertising man; but then——

Well, doesn't the whole ticklish subject of whether or not we shall insist on impeccable English in our advertisements boil down to this: Do we want our copy product to have a professional or an amateur look? Are we really justified in ignoring or scamping *anything* that may promote a professional finish? And is that finish consistent with a careless slipshod handling of the language we pay out?

Getting your idea over remains, of course, the paramount job; but getting it over without solecisms and bungled English won't dissuade buyers—and *will* impart that "polish" to the advertisement that lifts it into the craftsman's class. Now don't sniff here, "Huh, are

we writing to the ordinary reader or to a bunch of rabid competitor copy-hounds?" For the fact is, as every advertising man knows, we're writing to both, and *must* write to both if we're to continue writing to the former. Clients demand—and quite properly—punctilious execution as well as cleaving idea, technique as well as technology; and buck if they don't get it. Deliberate perversions for the sake of satirical or humorous effect do not, naturally, come under fire; but the unconscious or careless misuse of English seems to need more censure than it's had of late—judging from contemporaneous exhibits.

This chapter will consider certain "lapses" which are perhaps the more irritating because they are quite common even in literary "literature." No attempt will be made to achieve hand-book inclusiveness; and a working knowledge of the rules of grammar is assumed. Please, incidentally, shy no poisoned adjectives at the volunteer purist who is more uncomfortable in a pulpit than any squirmer in a pew. "This is going to hurt me worse," etc.

To cases, then. A few stubborn misspellings first. "Sybil" is a name found frequently in a certain type of advertisement. Classy! *Vere de Vere!* And Sibyl (spelled correctly) *is* a charming name with a blood pedigree. If the writers who favor it would only look it up in the dictionary they could continue to secure the la-di-dah effect they covet without offending read-

ers who prefer not to wrest the name from its origins. Why that "i" and "y" have come to be so persistently transposed is one of the mysteries that the Cumæan sibyl did *not* pass on to Tarquin.

"Wrack" as a verb is another unplumbed mystery. How often advertisements use "nerve-wracked," "wracked with pain." Yet there's no warrant for it. "Wrack" is a good noun but an outlaw as a verb. That insidious "w" has crept up on it under cover of its good standing with the noun, and bids fair never to relinquish its strangle hold. Probably the analogy with "wreck" (the verb) is the real culprit. Moreover, "racked" is too simple. The "w" gives the word a more elegant, a more learned look. It's just another case where the writer goes out of his way to put on a little side—and takes a spill.

This gratuitous meddling with correct English reminds me of an annoying personal experience. In a certain article I had used the phrase, "an imbecile practice," and had O.K.'d the proof wherein this reading was retained. But before publication some conscientious editor or proof-reader, nosing through the paper, had intelligently changed "imbecile" to that barbarism, "imbecilic"—a version common enough indeed but one lacking either precedent or reason. "Imbecile" is, of course, both the noun and the adjective.

One "m" in "accommodate" is a frequent blunder,

"nickle" for "nickel," "tieing" for "tying," "spic" in "spick-and-span" (than which what could be more wantonly heretical?). "Pavillion," "synonomous," "tranquility," "optomistic," "villify" are misspellings frequently met. "Desiccate" is another teaser: nine out of ten will double the "s" and halve the "cc," forgetful of their Latin "de" and "sicco" which unite simply enough to form the word.

But words that are misused are even more exasperating than wayward spellings. Perhaps the most impudent offender is "hectic." There's a word that has positively run wild. So sharply, indeed, has it digressed from its original meaning that it now proposes almost a direct contradiction of that meaning; yet so universally is it used in error that no doubt the distorted meaning will eventually have to be lexiconized. But—at the moment—when you say you had a "hectic" time, so far from conveying the idea that you enjoyed a gay reckless session, or survived a series of difficulties and troubles (either of these current meanings presenting the idea of unusual stress or excitement), what you're actually saying is that you had a commonplace, routine, humdrum time: virtually the opposite of what you are trying to affirm. For "hectic" means "habitual," "constitutional," "continual"—pertaining especially to the slow waste of animal tissue that occurs in tuberculosis. And that special meaning is, of course, what started this word on its career of deceit and imposture.

Hectic fever, hectic flush—meaning simply chronic, habitual—became gradually one word in sense, viz., flush, fever. "Hectic" was absorbed in that meaning, lost all identity—and now masquerades as in effect the adjective from "fever": for "feverish" is its best current synonym. Funny, isn't it? But suppose you wanted to give "hectic" its right meaning? Wouldn't you feel like consigning to the nearest abattoir the china-shop bulls that have trampled that meaning to death?

"Prone" is another word that nobody ever looks up. If you find you can lie "prone on your back" after a glance into your dictionary, why, go right ahead using the word that way.

"Masterful" for "masterly" in the sense of "admirable" is another irritant. "Masterful" means "domineering," "imperious," "self-willed."

"Forcible" is often erroneously used for "forceful," "proprietory" for "proprietary," "fortuitous" for "fortunate," "otiose" for "grandiose"; "venal" is mixed with "venial," "precipitous" with "precipitate" (adj.); "moiety" is used as meaning only a little bit, whereas it means exactly half (probably confused with "modicum"); and "mitigate against" has its addicts.

I've a down, too, on "loan" as a verb; "lend" is certainly better English and "loan" carries burden enough as a noun. And *will* somebody put the definitive kibosh on "peer" in the sense of "the greatest"?

Peer of them all! That means, of course, equal of them all, in other words, no better than the worst. Yet this pernicious misconception of a word—due, probably, to its analogy with "peer" (of the realm)—*is* encountered in advertising literature. . . .

Apropos looking things up before you spring them, I ran across, the other day, an advertisement which alluded to some impending disaster as "the sword that Damocles suspended by a single hair." The confiding writer had read a hundred times about "the sword of Damocles" . . . silly to go looking up a story as familiar as that one!

Then there's Frankenstein. "Creating a Frankenstein" is almost unanimous. Even Edith Wharton falls into this error (in *The Reef*). . . . And "bromide" for a trite saying! Should be "bromidiom," of course: the bromide is the fellow who perpetrates the *cliché*.

When we come to syntax there are a few more pet solecisms and improprieties that ought to be drowned. "Like" for "as" or "such as": "Like Mother used to make," "Not like we did."

"Everybody stood up in their seats," "Every one of these objections are met." You wouldn't say, "Everybody are here," would you?

"Less than twenty people were present," "There were six less machines than before." "Less" for "fewer" is an obstinate sinner.

"In spite of" for "despite." Old C. A. Dana used to "rare up" over this one.

"The ten biggest (best, highest, etc.)." Is there more than one biggest?

"Their snappier, positive, peppier pickup": a thorny positive degree between two rosy comparatives. "More positive" wouldn't cure this sentence, since it might be argued that here "positive" paradoxically is a superlative; but why not "A positive pickup, snappier, peppier"?

"The house stood firmly against the blast": adjective, not adverb. There's a lot of loose syntax piled on adverbs. Again it's the writer's desire to be "stylish": "The house stood firm" sounds abrupt, crude, unpolished. Yet the qualifier belongs to "house" and not to "stand."

"Miss ——— ———, when she first began using ———'s" adorns a current car-card. Everything else on this card is good: art, typography, composition. Then this "first began" hits you between the eyes or below the belt, depending on the state of your spleen—and you wail, Why couldn't they make a flawless, a professional, job throughout?

Pronouns are bad actors. A recent advertisement 24-pointed "Even for we ourselves." "Let's you and I" is common, and "None but he knew." There'll be a "holler" at this one, for "None but him knew" does sound sour. But try "None excepting he." The fact is

that some perverted grammar is so prevalent that the right reading seems rancid.

"Thirty days' grace are allowed." This is unbelievable but it stands on the premium slip of one of the world's great insurance companies. Pity the poor bewildered wight who originally agonized over that line and decided that since thirty days was (were) undoubtedly plural it (they) must have a plural verb; but is it conceivable that nobody else ever saw that horror before it got into print?

You'll often turn up, too, such gems as: "The steady stream of ads help to create business." Also, "Neither of these reasons explain."

All down the line, indeed, plural and singular wage a bloody battle. The *collective* singular, plural in form but singular in meaning, rarely gets its logical due. "A few strokes of a damp mop remove," "A few whisks of a soft cloth make them shine," "Three applications clean this material": those statements are balmy on the ear, but what about the sense? Singular, of course, in every case, and the singular verb should have been used. It's the *operation,* the cumulative effect, that's meant, and that's a unit, singular. Not the successive strokes or whisks or applications but the series as one. Similarly, "And the last ten feet are the hardest" won't wash grammatically.

While I was jotting down these specimens for analysis (and they're all actual examples from current ad-

vertising and publicity material) a conspicuous Sing. vs. Plur. puzzle sidled into my mind: "What a whale of a difference just a few cents"—and there I stuck. Was it "make" or "makes"? I posed a number of my advertising friends who unanimously declared for "makes." But "Are you sure?" toppled 'em all. They—and I—had seen that advertisement a thousand times, yet so unsettled had we become by attrition with careless Englishers that we could give only what we thought it ought to be, were mortifyingly uncertain as to what it was. Then I called up a lowbrow tobacconist friend. He also replied from memory but was quite positive. "It's 'make,' of course; 'makes' would be bad English!" When I telephoned the advertiser finally I learned which number of the verb had been used. But what I wonder now is, Was the syntax question ever raised? And if so, was it decided against grammar and sense and *for* English (as my lowbrow friend construes English) just because of the rather decisive plurality of lowbrows? The problem is a knotty one and I'm not sure that grammar here has the better case. . . .

But we don't need to be bigoted to decide for good English in such cases as "Insist that the Gold Seal appear" (not "appears"), and to invoke the blue pencil for such abuses of the antecedent as, "Outwardly composed, the drumming of the man's heart deafened him," or "On his hind feet, nose to her shoulder, she impulsively drew the dog to her."

More subtle digressions are: "More and more bakeries provide," where you're in doubt whether "More and more" is adverbial or adjectival; "More beautiful and gayer" which nonchalantly but unnecessarily doubles the comparative; "For a new stucco house or overcoating an old one," which fails to repeat the preposition in the shift to the participle; and the growing vicious habit of ignoring the apostrophe in such phrases as "You cant win," "———s Thats All," *Ladies Home Journal* (not by the magazine itself), and "———, The Nations Favorite Candy."

Even the comma must be introduced cautiously. One tragic example of a heedless use: "A big opportunity to the manufacturer seeking a stable, expanding outlet for his product." You wonder whether he closed the door of the stable after he'd ended his search.

Another grievance one might cite (although it's off the direct rails of this trunk-line of complaints) is represented by such statements as "The ——— removes more dirt per minute." More than—what? It is submitted that a dangling uncompleted comparative is both a confession of weakness and an affront to reader intelligence. "It's bigger and better" says nothing at all —and *does* nothing at all but get your back up.

But perhaps one of the most distressing symptoms of declining health in the technique of copy writing is the eccentric action of the word "only." There's probably no greater single menace to the nervous sys-

tem of an advertisement. "Only" is misplaced in every other sentence in which it figures. The way that word is kicked around! "He only gave me one," for example. Does that stand analysis? What you're saying is, "He only *gave* me one, didn't hit me over the head with it," or *"He* only—not his mother-in-law." Two possible (and grammatically inescapable) misinterpretations! And in a simple, straight five-word sentence. Oh yes, the *sense* is conveyed all right: we get you—but why not say, "He gave me only one" and be on the side of the syntactical angels as well?

"I only arrived yesterday." Fortunate that you only arrived and didn't explode like a balloon, or that you didn't bring all your maiden aunts with you.

A flea of a word, "only." Always hopping into spots where it hadn't orter be. Watch for it. You'll be astounded at the infrequency with which it is correctly used.

The classic example of how malignantly this word can upset sense is the child's innocent transposition in the last line of Joyce Kilmer's poem, *Trees:*

> Poems are made by fools like me
> But God could only make a tree.

CHAPTER 16

SHALL WE CULTIVATE ADVERTISEMENTS THAT SCAN?

A SEQUEL TO "SHALL WE INSIST ON FLAWLESS ENGLISH IN ADVERTISING?"

If I said that I was going on playing schoolmaster because so many people had written begging me for more cracks over the knuckles, you would not only accuse me of spotty taste in airing that fact—but probably impugn the fact itself. And if I reiterated my confession that nothing so daunted me as the steps to a pulpit, there would be saints down in the pews who would pray like mad for a soul perjured twice in the same paragraph.

Therefore, of course, I'm going ahead with it.

But before I ask you to gather with me a few more solecisms from the Elision Fields (please don't suggest I've misspelled that one), and then invite you to test the crop in a neighboring pasture, I want to clear up a misconception or two. That critic who took pen in hand to chide me (under the caption, "Watch the Words and Miss the Message") appeared to think

that Teacher recommended rules-ridden and stilted English because he favored the correct use of words, sentences and allusions! Tut, tut! Then he became even more clairvoyant. "The writer," he chirped, "who takes care to say precisely what he means will write flawless English"! Wow—and this from one who is, on his own confession, a "correspondence counselor"! I fear this gentleman would be out of a job if any of his prospective clients should spot that naïve admission. And with him in the breadline would stand every editor, every re-write man and every teacher of composition in America, all trying to exchange their useless dictionaries and reference books for a cup of misspelled coffee and an ungrammatical sandwich.

Seriously, however, as to the "tyranny of rules," I'm just as strong for liberty and the right to fracture as he or any other emancipate could be—preposition at end of sentence, split infinitive, slang, anything—but only when your effect demands it and only when you know how to set the broken limb afterward. A young man once protested to Dudley Buck that he didn't need to study theory to become a musical composer. He had ideas—why not just let 'em write themselves? If he took care to say in music precisely what he meant why couldn't he write flawless compositions? (Zowie!) And then he launched this clincher. "Chopin," he whinnied, "broke all the rules of compo-

sition and got away with it!" "Sure," said Buck, "but he had mastered those rules before he broke them."

It's with the fellows who write advertisements before they've mastered the art of writing anything that I quarrel.

Some other straw-men—all with a strong family resemblance—have been put up and pummeled by lusty writers in alleged rebuttal. There's the chap who says, "Write in your letters exactly what you intend to say and you'll achieve good writing," as if he were saying, "Pay attention to construction and syntax and your writing will be, *ipso facto,* putrid." A prime fallacy, vulnerable on both counts. For an illiterate man could say what he intended to say yet miss good writing by several miles (indeed, even some college men can say what they want to say yet say it with detonating illiteracy); and, conversely, anybody who isn't a bigoted pedant can pay heed to syntax and construction, yet say fairly decisively what he intends to say. Will his knowledge of English prevent that? Can't one write comprehensibly and correctly at the same time?

Nothing is more stupid than to decry attention to syntax and style as something that necessarily fogs meaning and cripples vigor. By correct writing nobody with any gumption means finicking writing. But saying what you mean *isn't* good writing unless you're familiar enough with syntax and words to say it right.

The honest business man who writes: "That last lot of goods weren't up to the mark and I can't either sell them nor give them away and what will I do about it?" is writing what he intended to say.

Isn't it about time we quashed this kind of argument? The fact is, of course, that the copy writer who writes with an eye on syntax—a myopic eye, at that—will in general write both more clearly and more vividly than the *au naturel* exponent.

And please don't anybody else tell me that the purpose of writing advertisements is to sell goods, as if implying that the man who insists on flawless English is fumbling that purpose! The desire to sell goods and the ability to sell goods are entirely compatible with careful English. Oh, yes. There we barge again into the ridiculous misconception that careful English means high-brow, stilted and finicking English. No such thing. Just as, according to the ancient proverb, there is a time to murder, there's also a time to murder English. You want a certain colloquial effect. Good: off with the head of a predicate! You're appealing to a certain class of reader: *let* the preposition tag on at the end of your parade of words—where it looks right to that class of reader. You want plenty of gusto in your message: O. K., unsheathe your adverbial sword and split all your infinitives from top to toe. I'm with you. I agree. I, too, rate "The safest instinct to ap-

peal to" above "The safest instinct to which to appeal"—to quote one malcontent. But—

When a writer carelessly or ignorantly uses "nor" for "or" and "hardly" with a negative; when he writes, "I deducted the right solution"; when he refers to the Hotel Netherlands and to Colonel Lindberg; when he says, "polite parliance" and "murial decorations"; when he locates the quotation, "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," in the Bible; when he mix-mets as recklessly as "Getting off to a flying start is often getting off to a bad finish, for if you don't hook the reader in the first line you may never land him at all"—things like that—then Teacher brandishes the birch.

Of course the purpose of the advertisement is to sell goods, and *of course* unless you're a witless pundit you're not going to "fine-write" that purpose into the discard. But this writing of advertisements is a professional matter; and it ought to be handled professionally. You don't disparage skill and address in any other department of work or play. Let, however, anybody suggest that the technique of advertising writing needs bolstering—and somebody sings out, "Syntax-bug." To such a pass has slovenly and semi-literate writing brought us. Well, let us—those of us who want better conditions—accept this challenge. Let's go farther. Let's declare that we're out for the

injection of *virtuosity* into the advertisement. And then let's pause and wait for someone to ask us just what we mean so that further divagations on this subject—and there's a lot more to be said on it—won't seem too frivolous.

But I'm away off the trails I laid down. Some addenda to the "watch your step" list:

Is there a more tempest-tossed word than "orthopedic"? Fellow with fallen arches calls up the Orthopedic Hospital. *Children's* diseases? But, but—well, it *is* rather confusing, particularly as some foot doctors use the same term. And indeed with an equal right etymologically. Root meaning child, or root meaning foot—take your choice. But don't call up the Orthopedic Hospital and expect to get any sympathy for your bunions.

"Livid" is a word that's not always used correctly —perhaps through being confused with "lurid" which is in general even less intelligently rendered. Simple colors, both, in the Latin original—and not the hues they're popularly supposed to be, either.

How many people know the difference between "mangrove" and "mandrake"? Or can tell either from a "mandrel"?

Words that, like Mike and Ike, look alike, *are* pests. Here's a brief list I once assembled that has helped me to pry some of these clingers apart:

aura: breeze, air
aural: pertaining to hearing
auric: pertaining to gold

But—

auricular: pertaining to the ear
Similarly, auriferous, gold-bearing, and auriform, shaped like an ear

Some more teasers:

blanch, to make white
blench, to flinch

aviary, bird-house
apiary, bee colony

entomology, bugology
etymology, derivation of words

veridical, truthful
viridity, greenness

euphemism, polite way of saying something unpleasant
euphuism, affected speech or writing
euphony, a pleasing sound

comminute, to pulverize
comminate, to denounce

erotic, pertaining to love
eristic, controversial

linear, measurement
lineal, ancestry

orthography, correct spelling
orthoëpy, correct pronunciation

calligraphy, beautiful handwriting—(F.P.A. is fond of this word but always spells it with one "l," perhaps because he thinks more compactly than the Greeks did)
caliginous, dim

venal, may be bought
venial, excusable
venous, pertaining to the veins
Venus—ah!

avatar, incarnation
atavism, throwback to more remote ancestor

osseous, bony
osmosis, a term in Physics (nothing to do with "os," meaning bone)
oscular, pertaining to mouth (nothing to do with either)

And look out for Dionysus, bootlegger god, and Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse (Hugh Walpole, in a recent article, took a fall out of "Dionysius, god of the grape"); also Artemis, the virgin huntress, Artemas Ward, Continental general, Artemus Ward, humorist, and Artemas Ward, of our own ranks.

A group of popular misspellings: "rarified"; "concensus" (you get two shots at this word which is often pleonastically cumbered with "of opinion"; "exhilerate" (another two-shotter since the word is used occasionally instead of "accelerate"); and "busses." "Busses" is kisses, not omnibuses.

Why say "capitalize on"? A perfectly good transitive verb. Capitalize it—i. e., turn it into capital.

Likewise, "approve" was transitive before the attentions of the preposition "of" made a philologically superfluous intransitive out of it.

"Between the three" continues to flourish; and there's another quaint use of "between." Example: "The packed stands broke into their college songs between every quarter of the game."

"Haphazardly" thrives, despite the fact that "haphazard" is the adverb as well as the adjective.

"Marquee" is a word which has had a strange evolution. It's here to stay, of course; but the right word is "marquise." What happened, plausibly enough, was that when the first marquise was built in America, the natives protested: "What do you call it? 'Marquise?' Why, there's only *one!*"

While I'm throwing divots around, there's "Uneeda." I confess to gagging at "Eat Uneeda Graham Crackers." To those who were brought up on that imperious pun, its decay to a merely nominal condition will never be acceptable. Perhaps the current generation slides over the double meaning, but I can't. And I find myself thinking, too, that N. B. Co. is something of an ingrate in this shabby treatment of the word that made them.

A recent advertisement declares, "Advertising technique has also made strides," where "also has" was meant. A quite different sense.

By way of oozing into the subject I laid down for

myself, may I ask the manufacturers of Othine how they pronounce that word? Like "Manger" and "Linit" (see chap. 8), "Othine" could be rendered several ways. Oh *thine* forevermore, Elinor Glyn would undoubtedly warble it; but Barnum's Fat Lady would never see it as anything but "Oh *thin*." Then there's O-*thine* ("th" as in "pith") and "O-*thin*" ("th" as in "with"). Also *Oath*ine, *Oath*in, *Oth*in (short "o"), Otheen, Ot-hine, Ot-hin, Othinny, Otiné—plenty. The point is, of course, how many people ask for something else that they can pronounce without fear of correction or of derision?

Similarly, while No-D-Ka, as a name for a toothpaste, may read "No decay" to all readers I privately doubt it. For "ka" spells not "kay" but "kah" in virtually every language; and those Americans who spring from European roots would, I submit, pronounce it "kah" as would also many simon-pure Americans since there is no final long "a" in English, either. (Unless you except Iowa!) Thus shoppers might be dissuaded from asking for this product from ignorance both of its pronunciation, and as well—a much more serious flaw—of its sense.

Now here's a lot of space used up and nothing yet on my subject. In the briefest possible compass, then:

Rhythm in the advertisement, especially in the headline, rhythm that not only makes reading easy, lures on and on, but transfers your message to the

reader's mind perhaps for years—rhythm sells goods. Yes, rhythm alone, not always backed by logic or performance; rhythm, lilt, catchiness have put over many a weak advertisement, shored up more than one tottering product. *Not* metrical prose, not verse in disguise; but words and sentences that sing none the less—even if the advertisement deals with a floor-covering. Magic carpet stuff: and the magic is in part the rhythm of the words and the sentence-structure. The point doesn't have to be labored. You grant it: you—we—are constantly striving for this effect. Even when we fall into the arms of an out-and-out couplet, like a certain recent headline, we don't mind much; for we know we'll get kissed by the sales curve anyhow. Do you remember that lyrical headline? "When the Circus Comes to Town with a Flash of Red and Gold." Memory value there!

Very well, then. But rhythm isn't achieved, any more than is careful English, unless the writer is familiar with his tools—in this case, unless he knows how to *pronounce* correctly the words he uses. Many an otherwise lilting line has been spoiled by a word which the writer had evidently always accented on the wrong syllable. And this is a vital danger because so many words in quite common use are sloppily or ignorantly accented in the wrong place. Naturally, therefore, if your readers know where those stresses belong, they're going to bump the bumps over the

sentence which you thought was a triumph of smoothness. In New York, particularly, there seems to be a sinister tendency to upset words, to give them the exactly opposite accent from that which dictionaries and well-informed people indorse. And, although in a written sentence or collection of sentences the difference is admittedly a subtle one, it may be nevertheless just the difference between a memorable rhythmical effect and a jolting forgettable one.

Obviously, this is an indictment that can't be supported conclusively by examples. For who's to say that the writer didn't deliberately inject the word that to your ear breaks the rhythm—being, perhaps, a militant foe of the suave and the fluent, in short, an apostle of the "sock." But I've encountered of late in advertisements so much jerky prose which sounds inadvertent that I've built up a little index from these findings. This consists of words that appear and reappear in phrases where rhythm falls down because, presumably, the writer is not accenting those particular words correctly—or, at any rate, as the majority of his literate readers will accent them.

I shan't attempt to give any context or to defend these citations. Some will be questioned; and indeed, though I've followed the consensus of authorities, there's always encouragement for the exceptionist. But here, for what it's worth, is a partial list of rhythm-wreckers:

Words erroneously accented on first syllable

detail, noun and verb
address, noun
express, noun
romance
divan
adult, noun and adj.
Monroe; Detroit
recess
research
entire
refill, verb
insane (ex-Governor Al Smith has perpetrated it)
contract, verb
rebate, noun and verb
finance, noun and verb
grimace, noun and verb
digest, verb
resource
defect
resale
inquiry
vagary
idea
precedence

Words erroneously accented on second syllable

extant
Tribune
decade
locate
ordeal
abject

permit, noun
survey, noun
harass (President Harding perpetrated it)
perfume, noun
costume, noun
exquisite
impious
paladin
pianist
Newfoundland
incubus
chivalrous
palanquin
importune
formidable
despicable
comparable
empyrean

Words that should be rendered as spondees (both syllables equal), although James Russell Lowell said there was only one genuine spondee in English, viz., "beef-steak." New York smacks these words on the first syllable:

ice-cream
Broadway
baseball
week-end
et cetera

I've even heard: *New* York.

"Cafeteria" (accent on "ter") disgraces its ances-

try; and "a-*poth*eosis" would be spurned by any self-respecting god.

As a wind-up, scan this quotation that falls into metre indeed but is quite lovely until you reach the last word. If you pronounce that last word in the generally preferred way (as evidently the writer does not) you wreck the whole rhythmical effect. Don't you?

"Blue tigers stalking caravans of jade and purple flowers singing with perfume."

CHAPTER 17

"ORDER-TAKERS" IN THE COPY DEPARTMENT

I haven't any in mine. But I have had. Earnest souls who could write like a house afire if you handed them a burning text; who could draw up the soundest market analysis or résumé of a factory trip; who could do anything and everything that must be done in a kinetic copy department except—dig out their own copy slants.

Now, before you swallow hook-line-and-sinker a corollary that these were worthless fellows, let me assure you at once that they were no such thing. Indeed, I should be personally a gross ingrate to suggest that inference. For I got good work from them, not merely good effort but good copy. Moreover, there may be copy chiefs so infallible of judgment and prolific of idea as neither to need nor to want creative assistants. Yet—

Well, here's my dope sheet. The copy itself is judge. If I possessed no writers of the creative type I should probably think the plugging journeyman's stuff pretty goshhanged good. As it is——! Come, set the two brain-children cheek by jowl. Strong family resem-

blance. Oh yes. Good features, both. Refined, intelligent, strong. You wouldn't be ashamed to acknowledge parentage of either. Same competent forehead and jaw, with their complemental pledge of lucidity and logic. Wait a moment, though. Their eyes! Color and shape alike: but—isn't there just a little more *life* in this one's?

That's my yardstick. I will not say that the order-taking writer will never produce a breathing piece of copy or that the slant-evoker doesn't occasionally wheel in a dead one. But in general the order-taker's stuff is appreciably lower—in B. T. U. and in R. P. M.

The order-taker, in short, usually raises doubts as to the state of his pulse.

That's to be expected, you object. Not every creative genius *seeks* a copy job. Supply insufficient to man exclusively every copy department. What's a copy chief to do if he can't lay hands on a gang of geniuses?

But—please—that's not in the least what I've been saying. It's not a case of genius vs. grub. A creator of literature may be a complete bust as a creator of copy. Conversely, a creator of living copy may be the world's worst bet at writing anything else. The order-taker in the copy department may be a writer who has issued ultimatums to the haughtiest publishers extant, and the successful copy writer may have emerged from a position where he took orders from office-boys.

That merely says what most advertising men know, viz.: Copy writers that are drawn from other fields of writing must be reborn—cannot be remade. The purpose of this brief inquiry is not to restate that truism but to fix a point whereat and whereby you can tell whether your candidate is going to stage a rebirth or turn in a jerry-built job of remodeling.

And that point establishes itself most decisively and most quickly in this very matter of order-taking.

The proposition may be set down as follows:

Copy that any writer himself originates will obviously have higher gusto, spontaneity and punch than copy based on another man's idea—an idea which the copy writer (a) may not be sold on at all, (b) may think he could improve if he were let, or (c) likes well enough but gulps down without the appetite that independent consideration of the problem would have generated for his own idea.

The other half of the proposition is that the writer who (a) is willing without protest to accept an idea he's not sold on, (b) doesn't fairly champ his bit with eagerness to try to improve on it, or (c) concludes that advertising copy doesn't need to be appetizing so long as it's wholesome—that writer, though his thought run as deep as Dean Hole's and his pen as Swift as Jonathan's, is a born order-taker and will never become an A-1 nonpareil copy writer.

CHAPTER 18

THE DEMON COPY PATCHER

A *different* way of saying the same thing is not *ipso facto* a better way.

Naturally, you remark with a smile.

Ye-es. But do you live up to this text? Is your acceptance of it more than lip-service? How about your *practice?*

Advertising men this way, now (for you're the fellows I'm after): how many times have you been invited to criticize a piece of copy prepared by some other advertising man, and failed to fall into the malignant trap spread by my text? How many times have you resisted the temptation to change here and there the writer's phraseology for your own—just for the sake of exercising your own pencil? Nothing seriously the matter with that piece of copy. If you could impartially compare the two after you've done your pleasant little job of patching, all you would be able probably to say is, "I don't like that way of putting it because I do like my own way." But, of course, you never do treat yourself to any such scathing frankness. You sincerely think you've improved that piece.

Oh quite. Yet in all probability you've simply said the same thing differently—and a referee would record a 50-50 break . . . then himself do still another piece that differed from both with equal indecisiveness.

Is that picture touched up any? Underexposed, rather! Every writer of copy will, I suspect, recognize his portrait in the above sketch—but how many of his critics will recognize theirs? For that's the tragic aspect of a situation that holds so much essential ironic humor. The original author's adhesiveness to his own version never begins to equal his critic's devotion to the revision. The author may admit that the changes have not damaged though they may not have improved his copy; but the critic not only cannot "see" anything except his own revision but views now with contempt the piece his version has superseded. To him the axiom would read: A different way of saying the same thing is not *ipso facto* a better way unless you get *me* to do the revising.

Now manifestly no such crude egomania as that is consciously at work. The critic is probably a modest enough chap in every other function of his thinking. But give him *carte blanche* with a piece of copy and what he'll do and how he'll think is generally what and how I have prescribed for him. And don't run away with the idea that this is a disgruntled copy writer's indictment of the unenlightened autocratic

account executive. Not at all. Copy writers will do the same thing among themselves, dog eat dog.

Try it out. Pass round your next piece of copy. You'll probably not submit it to a man who doesn't instantly —and usually gloatingly—pull out his pencil. Think of the self-revelation as well as the callous rudeness declared by that ready pencil. Never occurs to him the piece may be right as it stands. Why? Because already he sees himself supplanting your piece with one of his own—and he's going to achieve that supplanting even if he can find nothing to change but the name of a character or the position of a comma. Oh yes, this happens. It is indeed only the unusual man, in either copy or executive department, who can divest himself of this weird partiality for his own version *because* it's his own version.

Harmless, if true, you object. But no. It's harmful. It sets up not only clogging resistances pro and con but also bad inhibitions. For it increases the tendency of the original author to undervalue and distrust his own work. He, as we have seen, rarely puts up a fight for that original version—not because he's pusillanimous or naturally modest, but because all authors always have been and always will be uncertain of the exact degree of rightness and of power in their work. That's why—although they may perceive that the revision when it is accomplished is no better or even worse, although they may be in advance fairly sure

that the critic is incapable of improving their stuff—that's why they seek the critic out and invite his ineffective patching. And that also is why the writer, who is always at the mercy of his own self-criticism, suffers additional and really salient hurt at the hands of the patcher. For his confidence is more deeply impaired, instead of being bolstered up; that deprecative pride in his own creation that needed only encouragement to know itself justified is nipped; and, worst of all, he drifts into the attitude, Oh well, I never can please him (or them) the first time, so why bother unnecessarily? And that is bad business as well as bad mentorship.

But beyond all this there's the waste. An item, this waste. Time, energy, money. The peregrinations of a piece of copy from hand to hand to hand consume hours, perhaps days. It's all right to have several cooks collaborate on a brew of copy—but not when each successively takes out the ingredient that the other has just put in. Even if rock salt is as condimental as Attic salt, the time lost in making the substitution isn't going to do the mixture any good.

Lastly, this patching works, in general, harm to the copy itself. For, by definition, it's snap-judgment, unconsidered and intuitive criticism. How can an impromptu opinion be entitled to tear down a structure of careful plan and studied construction? The snap critic probably substitutes an expression or a word

that the copy writer has discarded among perhaps twenty variants in his search for precisely the right presentation of the facts—facts which he has studied twenty minutes or 2000 minutes to the critic's one; or changes the order or shifts the emphasis to an order and emphasis that the writer abandoned back in his first draft, because neither could be sustained by the immediate merchandising needs with which probably he—and not the critic—is in closest touch. So all down the line. Surely it stands to reason that the impromptu decision however "inspired" must upset generally a more sound and dependable evaluation of the facts. Yet the merry patching goes on *ad infinitum*.

The whole subject is, of course, a gnarled and difficult one. It's not dismissible in a couple of pages. There will be patching so long as copy writers obey their temperamental instincts and ask for it—and so long as critics are temperamentally unable to keep their pencils in their pockets. But these two extremes could be brought much closer together and a healthy deal of waste and friction be averted if every patcher's pencil were to discharge first of all the text of this little homily: A *different* way of saying the same thing is not *ipso facto* a better way.

CHAPTER 19

PRUNE THAT VOCABULARY!

When a man takes the floor to broadcast opinion which you've always sworn by—until you got into Advertising; when your own practice locks step with his theory until he "sicks" that theory on to Selling; when, in short, you're playing fair with nine-tenths of yourself when you're playing along with him—then it doesn't seem quite sporting to make that minority tenth vocal.

On the other hand, if you hold both an advertising job and a brief for the forensic kind of forum, then to step on what you must construe as error becomes a righteous mandate.

That Fear of Big Words article in a recent magazine issue caused me to perform the dizziest *volte-face* of my somewhat rotary years as an advertising man. For, as you will have begun dimly to surmise, I am myself not untempted by the precious and the recondite word. Even have I been known to use big ones; and I too have fulminated at the ubiquitous blue pencil which azures out every word that might befuddle his majesty the moron.

But now, ah, I am an apostate. Off big words for life—so help me all the monosyllables of Mnemosyne!

And the reason?

Well, the author cites a list of jaw-breakers spilled by Arthur Brisbane, who is unquestionably read with approval by several morons. *If* polysyllables and exotic words in a proletarian editorial column, it is implied, why not on the advertising page? But I submit that the analogy, though it has a taking glitter, is really pewter. For Mr. Brisbane is selling his audience something the cost of which is not computed in what they would call cash money. Isn't that the nub of the matter? Isn't that why, when his readers come to a word they don't understand, they glide over it without resentment—with indeed a pleasant titillation of the flattered mental fibre? But suppose he were selling a commodity or a service at a price in money—and the reader collided with (say) "Nucleolus." The answer to that posit is, of course, that Mr. Brisbane wouldn't put it there. Mr. Brisbane is far too "cagey." Last man in the world to hypersyllabify an advertisement! Why? Because he knows that's bad selling, knows there are sound reasons why the fear of big words in advertisements is warrantable. May I set down four such reasons as they present themselves to me?

First: When you're selling something by the printed word you've got to sell continuously and you've got to sell fast—and the first word you use that the pros-

pect doesn't understand will probably be the last word he'll read. If, then, you just must get a big word out of your system slap it in at the very end; although even there it will probably puncture your advertisement for the following reason:

Reason Number Two: When you're selling by the printed word you've got to sell with every word. Even, therefore, though a big word appear to be the only word that fits, chop it down into paraphrase: for since by definition every word is vital to the sale your obscure word (whatever its position) is taking the place of a vital word—and will probably kill the advertisement.

But Reason Three is the knockout. Nobody will buy a pig in a poke. Buyers are incorrigibly suspicious. When, then, they turn up a word they don't understand, they naturally think they're being bamboozled. Maybe that word is the nigger-in-the-woodpile. Ah ha, that's the catch—but it won't catch me. They've got to get into their heads every single thing you're saying about this product; and you won't get into their purses if you leave even one word outside of their heads.

A fourth reason against lugging big words into advertisements—and I'm persuaded Mr. Brisbane would indorse it though perhaps somewhat ruefully—is a sort of summing up of all these arguments: People read advertisements *through* if there's the smallest

chance that they're ever going to buy your article. Ergo, you've got to *make* them read to the end if you're ever going to sell that article. Different with editorials: all the average man needs to make him "buy" just words is to get the general drift.

There's a kind of nebulous fifth reason. Prospect's back goes up if he thinks you're talking consciously either down to him or up to him. You've got to nick the mean—and handle language as if you were neither patronizing him from a lofty eminence nor trying to "kid" him into a good humor. Big words can effect both these sorts of damage. The expert craftsman may gamble, guardedly, with the humor that big words undoubtedly can pack; take an occasional flyer with a flippant or satirical polysyllabic audacity. Let even him beware, however, for nothing atrophies the buying impulse so surely as: either (a) the prospect's prickly fear of being made a fool of; or (b) the laughter at *yourself* you may unwittingly churn up in him.

Probably a more penetrant analyst of the human soul than Henry James never wrote in English. But do you recall a certain newspaper article he did some years ago, entitled, I think, *On Revisiting America*? Trip on a ferryboat gravely excited him. "We were ferried to Jersey," he wrote, "by the greatest of transpontine barges." That line got Henry James, if not the first, certainly the biggest and most ribald laugh of his ca-

reer. Yet he was vending his "A" brand of seriousness.

A superlative merchant of words, Henry James! But he couldn't have sold a ferryboat the longest day he lived.

CHAPTER 20

WHY *INVITE* THE READER TO MUFF YOUR MEANING?

"Rumors that Speakmans and Brants have not yet amalgamated false."

Had a certain well-known New York manufacturer read the above telegram twice, there would have been no disaster. A liaison of importance to his house would not have lapsed by default, and his office associates would have escaped the bawling-out of their lives. But, on the other hand, one of the most original investigations any business house ever undertook would not have been inspired, and a distinctly novel contribution to the question of negative vs. positive construction in business correspondence would never have got itself into multigraph.

The facts were, briefly, as follows:

Speakmans was one of this manufacturer's "fractious" customers. The type of client that hates to stay put, is forever grumbling, forever breathing threats. Yet the manufacturer, by dint of much personal tender nursing, had managed to hold on to his wayward customer for some years. Now, however, a merger with

Brants, an even bigger distributor in the same industry, had been whispered; and Brants was a competitor's account. Question was, who would get the combined business? Could the tail be so manipulated, strengthened, cajoled or hocused that it would waggle the dog? In other words, could the Speakman connection be "sold" to the merger in the face of "old man" Speakman's constant though passive disgruntlement and the almost certain opposition of the Brant interests?

The manufacturer thought it could. And he'd three reasons for his faith. First, "old man" Speakman, though representing only a third of the combined capital, was definitely the strong man of the proposed new outfit, and, the manufacturer believed, would make his own running. Second, the "old man," if something of a crab, had always in the end come to heel, and personally, the manufacturer was convinced, liked him in his own savage way. Third, the news of the proposed consolidation had been zealously guarded and the manufacturer hoped and believed that Mitchell, his competitor, was not as awake to its imminence as, through some vicarious gumshoe work, was he himself.

The situation demanded, therefore, only his live presence in Speakman's office at or very shortly after the moment when the news was to be given out. But no frontal attack! No awareness on his part. Speak-

man might be a coarse man but he fell for no coarse work. Finesse: that was the manufacturer's winning card. And, above everything else, immaculate innocence. He would just drop in at Speakmans' ostensibly on one of his swing-round-the-circuit calls—only *this* call would be *timed*. And, obviously, if he were to reap the psychological advantage he hoped for, that timing must be very cunningly handled. He mustn't arrive *before* the news broke, because he couldn't very well repeat, perhaps only a few days later, a call that then would fatally lack its impromptu-opportune flavor. Nor must he come too long after the disclosure, lest Brants' man get in ahead of him. No, he must be ingenuous Johnny-on-the-spot and trust to his own personality to rivet the deal there and then.

He could see just how he would "play" the old crustacean: permit him to release the staggering news, look partly pleased and partly grave—a nice adjustment between the proud consciousness that he could measure up to the broader opportunity and a deferential demeanor that refused to assume anything until Mr. Speakman chose to indicate his friendly intentions. He could even hear the "old man" blackguard him: "You'll never be able to swing it, you —— buzzard, and we'll all go broke, but you're on the job a lot more often than Brants' fella and your luck's with you being on the dot this trip and the upshot

is, my boy, I think I can promise you you'll get the Brant-Speakman business. How's that, hey?"

The impromptu look he meant to give his visit was easy—with the proper co-operation of his home office. For it happened that he was about to take a trip of a fortnight or so to give several clients the once-over and the glad hand; and he would just work out his schedule to land in Chicago—where Speakmans and Brants both had their headquarters—at the psychological moment that his office at home would convey to him by wire. (The "boy friend" of an old school-friend of the manufacturer's secretary was the useful Speakman "plant.") He, the manufacturer, would, in the meantime, make several mid-western ports of call prepared to descend on Chicago with the least loss of time when the starting-gun telegram should catch him up. A carefully worked-out itinerary governed his secretary's dispatch of running instructions.

Thus, on the morning of his arrival at his Fort Wayne hotel, he received a wire stating that the new joint board was to meet the following morning at ten to elect officers; and mentally congratulated his secretary on the skillfully indirect way she had conveyed her news. That was all to the good, then; everything was working out splendidly; he would clean up his Fort Wayne connections, get a good night's sleep, and jump the early morning train which would land him at Chicago *after* the board meeting but in good time

to tow the "old man" out to what might be a very profitable lunch. He wired the outline of this plan to his office, and went competently about his Indiana business.

Singing while he shaved and dressed next morning, he spun his melodious day-dreaming out too long; and suddenly realized he'd got to step if he wanted his train. A hasty snack at the restaurant bar, the taxi whining at the door; the last rush to the cashier's desk —and a telegram thrust into his hand as he turned to leave. Torn open pettishly, it revealed the message with which this literary jackpot was opened: "Rumors that Speakmans and Brants have not yet amalgamated false."

"Heigho," he breathed, "good for Miss Blank. Just caught me in time. I'd have messed things up in great style. But I wonder what's holding up that combine?"

For, you see, in his towering hurry, he had skimmed over the beginning and end of this precious message, and what his brain got was: "Speakmans and Brants have not yet amalgamated." Precisely the opposite meaning! . . .

Well, he reflected, that was all right: deal put off, probably, for a few days. He must have read too much into Miss Blank's "skillfully indirect" first message. At any rate, it wasn't his cue yet and he would just continue with his traveling schedule. He crammed the wire into an outside pocket, his mind working fast.

Wasn't there a train just about now to Detroit? He could slip over to Fordville and see Jenkins and his crowd—good! Into the taxi, therefore, he bundled, and caught the train that carried him away from opportunity. Recalling the telegram as he rolled out of the station, he sought it vainly in pocket after pocket. Must have dropped it. Well, no matter: the merger was simply deferred and he would hear further no doubt at Detroit.

Somewhat to his surprise, there was no word awaiting him there. Nor did any arrive during the three days he spent in the vicinity. Evidently their dope was 'way off. Finally, a wire arrived from his office that made him see several hues of red. It ran: "Didn't you get to Chicago Brant Speakman reported closed deal with Mitchells." What could it mean? Mitchell—his sluggish competitor? Had Mitchell also been able to tap some source of information and out-manœuvred him before the merger? But there'd *been* no merger! Or had there? He'd not had time to do more than glance at the newspapers. Hadn't his office wired——? That message which said they'd not yet consolidated! Something queer about that wire, wasn't there, now that he mentally re-read it? Had his office balled up the dope or had he in his haste misread——?

He took the next train back to New York.

There everything was at sixes and sevens. Events had moved as follows: The scout at Speakmans' had tele-

graphed that the deal was closed and thereupon Miss Blank sent the first telegram—that guarded indirect message which the manufacturer had properly commended. No sooner had it been dispatched than the sales manager of the concern stormed into the office declaring that the New York Exchanges were humming with rumors of a split at the last moment. The consolidation was not coming off! "Nonsense," briskly retorted Miss Blank. "Possibly," demurred the sales manager, "but if the boss hears that, he won't dare act and I've a hunch it's Mitchell's started this racket just to serve his own ends." Miss Blank objected. "It's Speakman," she affirmed. "Just his secretive way. Wants to take us all by surprise. But, if you're worried, I'll call up Nell's friend tonight at his home, get the absolute dope—I know he's to be trusted—and you can catch the boss with a wire before he leaves Fort Wayne that'll ease his mind if he's heard anything. Be at the office at eight in the morning and I'll have the real low-down for you."

Thus it was the sales manager—no master of literary finesse or of crystal clarity either—who scribbled next morning in wild haste the telegram that spilled the beans. Incidentally, as later appeared, Mitchell had *not* started the rumors, it *was* Speakman with his devious obscurantist ideas; and Mitchell had merely responded to a wire from Brant after the board meeting, sauntered out there, as it were, and become the

man of the hour when old Speakman, puffed up with his enlarged importance as president of the new combine, "allowed" that probably both manufacturers were robbers but he guessed he wouldn't go to the mat with the other interests and since Mitchell was on the spot Mitchell could consider the business his. This was the stultifying news that had smashed the peace of his rival's office, every inmate of which had of course supposed that their boss was all this time in Chicago liable to wire "Success" at any moment. What on earth was he doing at Detroit, whither at last in their dismay they'd sent the message which the news of Mitchell's coup had precipitated?

Into this turgid situation the boss himself burst like a thunder-clap.

"Well?" he demanded of Miss Blank and the bewildered sales manager.

Question met question head-on.

"Why didn't you go to Chicago?"

"Why did *you* wire me the consolidation was not yet effected?"

"Oh, but we didn't——"

"Bring me the carbon of that telegram."

Then the whole tragi-comic story came out.

"Why in hell," was the enraged manufacturer's intermittent refrain, "did you have to shoot your information out of a silly-ass negative popgun? Of course, if it hadn't caught me just as and when it did—

and then gone and lost itself out of my pocket—and—and—oh, the devil! Furthermore, you didn't need to send it at all though your tactics were right, of course; for as it happened I never heard a whimper of those 'rumors.' But you see what your pernicious negative complex has done, don't you? Couldn't you have been satisfied with—with—listen: 'Speakman and Brant definitely amalgamated disregard all rumors to contrary.' There, that's what you wanted me to know, isn't it? And you can't misread that! Oh, yes, and it's ten words, too, just like the other: I suppose you congratulated yourself on your masterly economy."

The sales manager pulled on a sickly grin, but wisely said nothing. Suddenly the manufacturer began to hoot with laughter.

"I know what you'd like to say," he gasped. "But I'm damned if I'll take all the blame, and what we're going to do right here and now is find out our psychological condition. Maybe you just sort of grabbed that crazy negative construction out of the ether, but maybe we've all contracted the disease. We're going to investigate. Miss Blank, I want you and your assistants to comb our correspondence carbons for a month back and record all the negative distortions we've been guilty of—the use of a negative construction where the positive could have been used, especially at the beginning of the letter where a negative note once struck is likely to create a mood in the

reader's mind that'll persist right through the letter. And then take the correspondence *to* us and study it the same way. Let's find out if we really have a negative complex here and check that with what our incoming mail shows. And you——"

He turned to the now recomposed sales manager.

"You make notes of the talk you hear, our salesmen's and others'—particularly whether they start their sales approach with a negative. Not, of course, such openings as 'You don't know me,' but the kind of negative for which a positive could be substituted, like, 'I don't want to take up too much of your time' for 'I'll take only a minute or two,' etc. I'm less interested in this verbal line than in the letters and it's actually less important since in a face-to-face encounter you can smile away any number of negatives. But that's not true in the case of letters—and as for telegrams——"

The sales manager winced.

"Well, well," concluded the manufacturer, "a report from each of you in thirty days. Get along now while I decide whether to wire congratulations to Mitchell or condolences to Speakman."

. . . . . .

That was the origin of a research which, in its entirety, would overrun a third of this book. For both Miss Blank and her employer were thorough and painstaking investigators, trained both to collect in-

telligently and to analyze dispassionately. The results astonished them. Perhaps one day the whole inquiry will be published. Enough here to say that the manufacturer's thesis stood proved to the hilt. There was scarcely a letter, either in his own carbon files or in office correspondence, that didn't turn up somewhere an unnecessary negative construction. The disease, as he expressed it to me, was almost universal. People went out of their way to perpetrate negatives. And the better educated the writer, the more scrupulous his style, the more germs of this sort he disseminated. In the introductory paragraph, just as he had surmised, the malady was most virulent. Some of his vicious specimens he showed me and one I remember particularly.

This was a letter in answer to an inquiry he'd sent out concerning a prospective addition to his stenographic force. It ran:

I cannot recommend Miss Matilda Clark too highly. Etc.

"Now," he argued, "can you really beat that? Notice that the girl's name happens as it's typed to fill out the line so that that line reads: 'I cannot recommend Miss Matilda Clark.' Bang! Busy executive stops reading right there. One black mark. Who is it? His eye drops to the signature. All right, file that one. Guess we mayn't be wanting this girl after all.

"Extreme? Sure! I read on and so would most men.

But I might not have, might have been too rushed or interrupted just then. Don't forget the Speakman-Brant telegram. Why take that chance? Isn't it easier and just as strong to say, 'I recommend . . . highly'? And even if there's no misunderstanding, you've set up for the reader a hurdle in negative form that he's got to scramble over, at a cost to his time and probably his patience, before he finds where you really do stand. But that creation of resistance which is the main indictment of the negative usage, bad though it is, is not my main holler. No, I'm hitting at the negative construction because, readers being the careless birds they are, the chance of error and of misunderstanding invests it—and to a far greater degree than most people suppose; and because the positive or affirmative rules definitely out any such chance."

He showed me some further evil specimens. "Do not fail to" was a very common sinner—and what possible excuse for it, he raved. Simply sticks a destructive "Do not" under the eye that is implored to register a "Do." Could anything be more senseless? Representative of so much of this silly, posturing, dangerous negativizing—

"Oh, and look here," he interrupted himself. "This new toothpaste, now." He held up to my gaze an ornate, beautifully lettered tube. "Read that third line."

" 'Harmful,' " I obeyed—and laughed.

"There you are," he rumbled. "Of course the whole

line, if you're willing to waft your eye all the way round, reads: 'Contains no harmful ingredients.' A harmless line enough, if it weren't so placed that you can't read it all at once, and can't *miss* 'harmful' which is all you see on the front of the package. . . . Well, I leave it to you, why monkey with the loaded negative?"

CHAPTER 21

THE COPY-POTTER AND THE CLAY

One must admit that *The Saturday Evening Post* is thick. Oh, dimensionally, of course! Thick *through!* Layer upon layer of ponderable page, floor after floor of skyscraping aspiration. Attempt to prop it up in front of you with a casual finger and it smites you on the forehead; grasp it with both hands and even then scarcely shall you feed comfortably from it. An armful it is as well as a mindful, a volume heroic of physique if somewhat inclined to shortness of breath—the Gargantua of the newsstands.

Yet, did the uninstructed reader but know it, these 180 or 200 or 250 pages of a single issue represent a whittling-down from probably not fewer than ten times the number. Each one of the advertising pages (and what proportion such are of the whole, advertising men are too modest to declare) probably packs with it anywhere from a dozen to a score of ghostly revises and rewrites discarded before this particular piece of copy was released. Interleave the magazine with all the successive husks from which the final copy emerged and—well, you *would* have a thick 'un, if you like!

Now one can be flippant and conceal deadly purpose. Furthermore, flippancy is a darn good counter for the confounding of flippancy. Juggle these two wise cracks and you'll begin to "savvy," maybe, what all this rather befrilled talk is about. Let's go down in the street and pick up some conversation.

"Oh, ads!" sneers one, supercilious. "Anybody could dash off those things. Why, they just write themselves."

"Sure," girds another. "And them fellows get paid *money!* Nothin' but a picture and some jazzed-up sellin' talk. Huh!"

And this is under- rather than over-statement. There's little doubt that the man in the street would be torn with bovine laughter if one tried to tell him the actual story of what stands behind and beneath the average advertisement. Come into the workshop, therefore, oh invidious spoofer, and stir with an exploratory finger any of these copy receptacles that look to you like ordinary desks. Here's a pile of manuscript—'bout a hundred ads, eh? Oh no, on'y the one, Sophomoros, on'y the one!

"But, but——" you bubble.

"Quite so," blandly chips in the copy-potter, pleased to be unglued from his stint if only temporarily; and even better pleased to assist in deflating a "know-it-all." "That piece of copy you see there on top, unscored by blue-pencil (dirty look for copy chief), is about the

twenty-steenth revise. I myself rewrote the ad—yes, little one, I know it's only about 150 words—at least 15 times; then his nibs here took a crack; then the two of us together. Oh well, I reckon twenty rewrites isn't too high!"

You are aghast; your mind feels nude; you'd never supposed——

"Flaubert," slices in the copy chief, "is credited with having rewritten *Madame Bovary* a dozen or more times. But that's not a patch on the work we do here. And we should, too. You fellows outside with your petty ideas of what goes into 'ad-writing' make me tired. This very piece of copy has $15,000 heaped on it this minute—that's what the client's going to pay for its appearance in two magazines, and single issues at that! Moreover, it'll be read by 15 *million* people. Isn't that important writing? Isn't it worth spending time on?"

The copy chief glares at you, encircles you with rings of whiplash garrulity, turns your blood to jello.

"And you—you think it's just dashed off! Man, before pen was put to paper on that campaign there was one solid year of investigation, with thousands of questionnaires and an intensity of research that would nonplus any seminar room in any college in the country. Every possible slant was studied: you'll find it hard to believe, darling, but there are merchandising problems in advertising!"

"Oh, don't ch-chide me so cruelly," you stammer, beginning to believe that maybe there *is* some little work back of writing advertisements, "but, say what you will, twenty revises looks like you must have begun with something pretty godawful bad——"

"That's it, that's it," wails the chief, flinging his arms madly, "there's no use preaching counsels of perfection to the philistine. Of course, *you'd* be satisfied with anything; *you'd* say, let 'er slide; *you'd* hate to make changes because it would muddle the stenographer's pretty work; you, you——"

"Come, boss"—the soothing hand of the copy-potter averts a murder—"what's the use? People'll go on thinking and saying things like that till the end of time. What do you care? Let 'em grin. Let 'em think it's just impromptu easy stuff. 'S no good raving about it. They don't believe you—won't believe you! Why, even this here now—gentleman——"

You bow with frigid dignity.

"Gentlemen," you say, underscoring the word sulphurously, "you are in error. I *do* believe. What's more, I'm going to sit straight down and let the world know what writing advertisements really means!"

CHAPTER 22

DEFENDING THE SLOGAN

Before the gentleman can be permitted to get away with his exposé of the slogan ("Is the Value of the Slogan Vastly Over-Estimated?"), some rebutting points should be laid before him. Without doubt he makes a strong case, given his premise that the sole value of the slogan lies in its identifiability with the product. But is this premise airtight? Does identifiability exhaust the slogan's potential utility? Does anyone really believe that the slogan makes no other contribution to sales?

At the outset, now, let's grant that the author has established at least this point, viz., that even advertising experts cannot always depend on memory to hook up the slogan with the product. But this discovery is not quite so startling as he appears to find it. Far from being a revelation, it will strike many advertising men as no news at all. Many of us know that few people can "locate" slogans. Many of us would ourselves resist to the death taking that test of fifty "dangling" slogans appended to his article because we suspect we couldn't pass it.

But that is not an indictment of the slogan; it's an indictment of the porous and flimsy structure which serves the average man for mind. All that our critic proves is that people are dumb, and Heaven knows that isn't news to advertising men—at any rate, to such advertising men as duck the chance of disproving that they are even dumber.

In other words, the author has "croaked" his man all right but it was a man of straw. For, why pin all reader-stupidity on the slogan? Do readers remember everything else in an advertisement? Can they cite any salient fact with anything like 100 per cent unanimity? Can they even—and this is the clincher—be sure of getting the manufacturer's name straight? Ask your friends still another, Mr. Author: pick fifty manufacturers at random and see how many of those friends can identify every product!

The fact is, of course, that advertising must contend with so magnificent and insuperable a reader tendency to fumble names and facts that *individual* advertisements are not and should not be expected to score a high percentage of definite dents in reader memory. That's not the purpose of an advertisement. The purpose of an advertisement (*a single advertisement*) is to make you product-conscious *at the moment of reading* and inspire you to buy that product before the moment is forgotten. If the manufacturer had to rely on the functioning of the memory of that particular

advertisement tomorrow, next week or next month, he would enjoy a high mortality in sales.

Now the slogan conforms with (though at first it may seem to challenge) this theory. Where it may appear contradictory is that ten million people may know twenty slogans by heart. Yet, as our critic so justly discerns, these same readers may be able to tie them up properly in a deplorably limited number of cases. That's the conformity! And the reason for this multiple memorizing despite the poor allocation lies, of course, in the nature of the slogan itself. For a slogan is no good unless it possesses this easy memorability, this trick of adhering to masses of minds, of immediate, almost automatic, quotability. Literally, the good slogan is a catch-phrase.

But its scope generally stops within its own length. The author is nibbling at the solution of this problem when he observes that slogans containing the name of the product crowd out all the rest. But where he errs, in my opinion, is in the postulate that anybody really expects the non-keyed slogan to evoke invariably the name of the product. The slogan will never do that, indeed; but it will, and does, do other things that atone for this entirely natural disability.

First: The slogan can tremendously accelerate that prompt propulsion toward buying that is a primary purpose of the advertisement. If an advertisement, as a whole, makes its readers go out today and buy,

neither manufacturer nor advertising man will raise a yowl because it's the sort of advertisement that may be forgotten tomorrow. And if the slogan assists that result who cares whether the buyer next week or next month pins it on some other product? The good slogan gives precisely this assistance. Its terseness or its rhythm, its audacity or its universality, tickles the reader, soothes, allures or excites him—and before he has a chance to forget the name of the product he registers the purpose to buy. That he is liable to forget the name of the product if you give him time enough reflects the incomputable value of the slogan which has made him act before he *could* forget.

But there's a secondary value. Suppose he doesn't buy immediately. Suppose he waits till he's forgotten what that slogan represents. The slogan, however, is lodged pleasantly in his mind. Mentally, too, he carries the little thrill of satisfaction with which he originally met that slogan. When, now, the slogan recurs to him he sees it (however vaguely) in a setting that once pleased him. He may not remember what the product is or may remember it incorrectly; but the point is—he's not buying now, at this particular moment. He's just remembering the slogan. That "tickler" *alone* isn't going to make him want to buy, nor was it ever meant to. The slogan acts in connection with and as printed on the advertisement. So what does it mat-

ter that people can't "locate" all the slogans? *Let* the little blighters play hookey, if they want to!

The beauty of the good slogan is this, that when the reader sees it again he will experience another vibration of that original pleasant thrill; and though he resisted the buying impulse the first time he will be much less liable to this time. It's the remembered slogan which has boosted that consummation, and scored its propulsive reminder at the precise moment when the advertisement is chiming in with explicit directions how and where to buy.

Too much emphasis cannot be laid on this point of the value of the slogan consisting primarily, if not exclusively, in its impact at the moment of reading the advertisement; and on the corollary of the unimportance of its identifiability with the product at any other time. This is why manufacturers regard slogans as assets, and also why our critic's "discovery" won't alarm them. If "Good to the last drop" and "Hasn't scratched yet" get mixed by a million people it doesn't matter, because another million are going to fall under the spell of these slogans and buy while the proper connection is fresh in mind; and the original million, who may now confuse these slogans, *have already bought*. For the really masterly slogan will do its work at some time or other in every reader's mind, even if then it dignifiedly releases that mind from the tax of remembering anything except its own seductive self.

CHAPTER 23

FULL MANY A FLOWER—

LIBELOUS CONVERSATION FABRICATED BY A COPY WRITER WHOSE LATEST "MASTERPIECE" HAS MET THE AXE

"That copy department of ours," spluttered Jim Plodge, charging into Carroll Dent's office and slapping a typed sheet on the desk, "is getting worse and worse. Plumb dippy on this last assignment. And if I've preached homely simplicity to 'em once—oh, what's the use? Read that and then tell me what we can *do* to get some decent copy from that bunch!"

Dent looked up wearily into the convulsed magenta face of his fellow account executive.

"Don't need your exhibit," he drawled. "Got one of my own. This gem just came through. Listen!"

With a brusque movement Plodge planted his left paw on the MS. page Dent was about to turn into fortissimo elocution.

"Hold up, there. Mine first!"

"Say, were you invited to come ramping in here?"

Plodge teased his features into what was meant for a wheedling smile.

"Oh now, Carroll, keep your shirt on. Read yours

first, if you must; but I really want your help. Perhaps there's something we could salvage in this mess of junk, you and I working together, hey? Tell you what. 'You scratch my back and I'll scratch yourn.' "

"That's handsome of you," jeered Dent. "How'd you know I want *your* help? Wait now, Jim," he added hastily, as Plodge uttered a saxophone snort. "After all I suppose we're in the same boat. This piece I got is just about hopeless but maybe—all right, I'll go you. We'll swap our bad news—and perhaps, with luck, we'll be able actually to *use* something that was started in the copy department!"

"O.K.," briefly assented Plodge, dumping some books off a chair and himself into it, "but isn't it *nice* that we have to practically rewrite all our stuff? Well, you shoot. But if you got anything to match the drivel they sent me I'll—I'll buy you a box of ripe closing dates!"

Clearing his throat explosively, Dent picked up his piece.

"Of course," he began, "there's an idea of a sort in this. But wait till you hear the way they've treated it. You'll laugh yourself sick over the head alone. Sit tight now. We're off.

" 'Somewhere west of Laramie,' " he intoned, sonorously—and a shriek of laughter from Plodge met and rough-housed with his own merry gush.

"'Laramie,' 'Laramie'? Where in thunder's that? And what's it got to do, anyhow, with the Stodge car? Some place near Butte, isn't it?"

"I'm sure I don't know—or care. Wild West, somewhere. Desert distribution, hey? But that's minor. How on earth is a head like that going to sell *cars?* However, just listen how the thing gurgles on:

"'Somewhere west of Laramie there's a broncho-busting, steer-roping girl who knows what I'm talking about.'"

"Hope so, I'm sure," wheezed Plodge. "More than *I* do."

"'She can tell what a sassy pony, that's a cross between greased lightning and the place where it hits——'"

"'Sassy,' 'greased lightning'—oh my word!" Jim broke in. "An electric brainstorm!"

"And," continued Dent, "there's even more of that kind of poisonous raving."

"Strike it," ordered Plodge. "Strike all you've read me. Bunk. Piffle. Charlotte russe in a tomato-can.—I nearly always strike a first paragraph anyhow, you know, just as a matter of form.—When does that copy condescend to make up its mind what it's out to *sell?"*

"Oh," airily replied Mr. Dent, "somewhere along about the middle. Here, it says:

"'The truth is—the Playboy was built for her.'"

"But, Carroll, what *spotty* logic! This dame's a broncho-buster. And we're selling an automobile! *That* lead's for a set of harness or something like that. Well, go ahead. At least, we've tied up with the name of the product!"

"Yes, but the writer wriggles loose right away again. Listen:

"'Built for the lass whose face is brown with the sun when the day is done of revel and romp and race.'"

"Ouch! Are we supposed to be writing for a lot of long-haired esthetes and pouting poets? 'Lass,' my sainted aunt! 'R' and 'R' and 'R'—apt alliteration's asinine antics! 'Done of revel'—why, it isn't even good English!"

"And, boy, the worst is yet to come!"

"Not another word. I quit. Doesn't our copy department realize that we sell *goods,* not lyrical spasms? If they proposed that spring song as anything but a joke—oh well, can it, can it! That's right: crisscross, double crisscross. Snap, goes the equally indignant pencil point! . . . And here's *my* piece of copy to go back with it. Won't insult your intelligence by reading more than a paragraph or two. But listen to this—and mind you, this is an ad supposed to be addressed to serious people, to induce serious people to *buy the product!* But what do you suppose? The writer—ha, ha!—has trotted out that hoary old personification stunt. So naïve, so quaint!"

"No!"

"Yes, by gravy—and then proceeds to dance the craziest Charleston that ever floundered across white space. Here she blows:

"'I am the printing-press, born of the mother earth. My heart is of steel, my limbs are of iron and my fingers are of brass.

"'I sing the songs of the world, the oratorios of history, the symphonies of all time.

"'I am the voice of today, the herald of tomorrow. I weave into the warp of the past and the woof of the future. I tell the stories of peace and war——'"

"Whoopee!" interrupted Dent, with a high-C cackle. "'War' is the word. War against a copy department that spills such fantastic high-brow froth! Send it back. I quit, too. There's nothing in either piece to work on. And these are the birds who're always whining that we turn down their best efforts. Why, Jim, do you know one of 'em said to me once, 'You fellows wouldn't recognize a masterpiece if you saw one'! Ha, ho, ho! Tell 'em for Pete's sake to come down to earth and write COPY."

Plodge sketched a smile, as he almost achieved the waste basket with a crumpled ball of what had impudently posed as an advertisement.

"And to think," he said, "that we've got a copy department imbecile enough to suppose any client would *use* such tripe!"

CHAPTER 24

FICTION TO THE RESCUE

More years ago than my wife allows me to publish, I submitted a short story to my college literary magazine. It *was* short—short of about everything a story should have. Poet on board ocean liner. An authentic poet. With a "name." And—with a tender heart. This bard is induced to "do" a lyric for the ship concert.

On the same program is another "poet"—a phony one with a pretty ego and a prettier wife. The all-wool poet has observed with benevolence the amorous vibrancies of this evidently newly-spliced pair. Clearly the girl idolizes her spouse. Always prattling about his "lovely poetry." Accident summons the imitation songster first. He reads, with suitable rapture, a piece of doggerel higher in gush than in grace. Everybody but the wife is in fits. She beams with 18-point pride.

The real poet squirms. Without vanity, he knows his number, which is next, will knock the everlasting daylight out of his predecessor's. One look he sinks into the wife's devoted eyes. Then—snatches his pencil and hastily but deliberately mutilates his own poem. Kicks the rhythm askew here, derails a happy rhyme

there. Reads a terrible travesty and draws his chaste reward from the girl's 36-point contempt of her husband's presumptuous rival.

A few days later the editor called me in.

"Well, Freshie," he said, picking his teeth with a corner of my MS., "this story's not so bad. Decently written. Original plot. We can't use it, though. 'Cause why? Hangs on an impossibility!"

I protested that maybe not on college editorial boards but elsewhere self-sacrifice could and did occur.

"Not the point," he replied. "Your man's action is morally O.K., but is physically and mentally impossible. Here, try it yourself"—he slipped a volume of verse and a pencil into my hands—"let's see you deface any poem there in a few seconds and not make crazy nonsense of the meaning. The meaning, man! Your poet had to leave that, didn't he? And it can't be done."

Well, I tried it. And it couldn't. *Touché!* I hadn't thought of that.

Years later, I accepted an almost identical challenge. Commercial setting this time. With two friends I had launched a publishing business. Set of books for salesmen to read. Flaming success—for a time. Twenty-six salesmen—on commission only—at the peak. Sales crackled.

Then—an unexpected general slump. Business began to retrench. The set of books became a luxury. Almost

overnight sales stopped. We'd disbursed all our capital. Something had to be done. Friend number one, the sales manager, did his bit. Resigned. Friend number two, not to be outstripped in resourcefulness, also tied a can to himself. That left the editor—me. With more spunk than sagacity, I decided to stick.

I called the salesmen together—those who were left! Made 'em an impassioned speech. Rally round your new sales manager, no need to get panicky, I blustered. Just go out and sell. Grief? Sure, but there's always a way. Won't buy? Make 'em. Use your wits. Forget your stock patter. Try new methods, new psychology.

That detested word got one man's back up.

"All very well," he growled, "but what? Which? What would *you* do if you stacked up against prospects who say they aren't even buying shoes? Who won't, most of 'em, even *see* a salesman? What's *your* formula?"

Well, there I had it between the eyes. Let's-see-you-do-it-yourself stuff, just like the college story episode. Could I show them? An imaginary experience, perhaps—write a story, not for a college paper this time, but for bread and butter, for career, that should dig a dozen men out of a hole?

"All right, you fellows," I said. "Give me till tomorrow morning and I'll draw up some kind of plan or confess you've a right to feel licked."

The appended playlet, written and printed within

twelve hours, was the result. Day or two ago, looking through some ancient files, I fished up my rough notes for it. (The brochure itself has no doubt gone back to its original pulp.) Struck me there might be suggestiveness in it for other harassed sales executives. Here it is, therefore, as I've been able to reconstruct it. The title, *Hurdles: an Interview,* starts the athlete off at

Hurdle I: The Outer Office

The scene is physically cheerless, almost bleak. A room, perhaps twenty feet square, monastically bare; boasting neither carpet nor rugs; two grimy windows giving on a blank wall admit grudgingly a natural light which seems depleted rather than increased by a bracket of anemic electric bulbs; not even a pictorial advertisement on the naked walls; dust everywhere; on hard rectangular settees against two walls sprawl a half-dozen discouraged-looking salesmen; there is a battered flat desk in the center of the room at which George Dooit, secretary to the president of the Hardshell Manufacturing Corporation, is just fussily reseating himself as, on the stroke of eleven o'clock, "Pep" Goode, another salesman, enters and joins the now animated contingent on the settees.

Dooit is a clean-cut, bustling chap of about twenty-four, not without that taint of self-importance which can turn so easily to insolence. He uncouples his

watch, lays it like a gun on the desk, consults some notes on the back of an envelope and rasps:

"Mr. Grouse has just twenty minutes this morning, and only if there's something very important. First man!"

"Pep" Goode sits back at ease as one after another of his predecessors goes through his set approach speech and is curtly turned down or fobbed off for another day. In a few minutes, thanks to that intimidating opening thrust as to the boss's limited time, the last of the six has bowed himself out and Dooit gathers up his belongings with the half-smile of satisfaction that registers a bluff brilliantly got away with. About to rise, he becomes aware of Goode still sitting at ease and smiling appreciatively. Dooit is puzzled: this man doesn't act like a salesman; no hurry, no flustered deference; just that grin. Dooit smiles back in spite of himself.

"Did that well," murmured Goode, still holding on to that understanding, "pally" smile. Dooit unbends further. "But you'll not expect to get rid of *me* that easy, will you?"

"Not so sure," grunted Dooit, stiffening up one side of his grin at a hint of challenge.

"You know you've not really taken a look at me yet," Goode went on smoothly.

"Oh—oh, yes; you're the chap left that booklet last week—some set of books, wasn't it?"

"It was—and is! But if that's all you recall about it you haven't read the booklet as I thought I'd got you to say you would—always knew I was a rotten salesman!"

Goode's disarming smile was met by the other man's now entirely unreserved laugh.

"Oh, no, you're not; you got me all right on that first talk, but I've been rushed to death—and after all I did lay the booklet on the boss's desk and what's more I've seen him with his nose in it once or twice. Tell you what you do: come back another morning when he's not so busy—"

"That twenty minutes you spoke of," cut in Goode, reflectively. "That's gone now. What you got down on your list for the next twenty?"

"Well, er—"

"Oh, come, old man: slip me through to him. You know in these depressed times he's not got a frightful lot on. Fact is, I'll bet what you're trying to save for him is this afternoon's ball game—"

"Wrong there," chuckled Dooit, "it's golf! Come on, you win; but don't blame me if he throws you out."

Hurdle II: The First Word

The inner office is less spacious even than the anteroom, but a totally different atmosphere reigns. Order, competent management, efficiency speak from the walls, lined with teeming bookshelves, from the desk

with its crisp piles of notes and correspondence files, and from the arched back of Mr. Grouse, bent over a sheaf of what appears to Goode ominously like bills. He does not look up from his work.

Dooit: "This gentleman—"

Grouse: "Can't see anybody."

Dooit: "But—"

Grouse: "Won't see anybody, then."

Goode (breaking in sweetly): "Mr. Dooit's got me wrong, Mr. Grouse: I'm no gentleman! How about two minutes for a roughneck?"

Grouse (his mouth twitching slightly, but still not looking up): "That sounds human, but—"

Goode: "Besides, you don't have to 'see' me if you can't stand it. Just reach out your right hand and salvage that little green booklet on the corner of your desk. It both looks and talks better than I do!"

Grouse (pushing back his work with a reluctant laugh): "You're an original guy, anyhow. Sit down —for two minutes. That's all, Dooit. Booklet? What booklet? Oh, ho, this 'Power-houses of Business,' hey? See here, that's a good selling idea you've got there: make every man on the sales force a better salesman by putting presidents to work as *engineers of ideas.* It's good. It's got a punch. Who thought of it?"

Goode: "Just common sense and honest dealing, Mr. Grouse. But did you read it, sir?"

Grouse: "I did—and what's more, I ate it. It's bully

fine dope. The selling ideas are corkers. But you're wasting your time here, for even if I were 'sold' to the need of such books I wouldn't invest anyhow. We're not spending a red cent. Wouldn't buy stamps at a discount. Sorry. Thanks for the chance to read that booklet. Here it is and—good morning!"

Hurdle III: The Stock Objections

Goode (treating Mr. Grouse to an unexpected dose of immovable silence, until the latter, irritated and on the defensive, looks up and meets his smiling eye):

"Mr. Grouse, you're a rational person or you wouldn't be where you are. And no rational man will refuse to spend money that will make money, and what's more, spend money even in the worst times if that expenditure's going to net a profit. You'll probably admit that ideas are fundamental to success; that you and your salesmen need all of them you can get; that you can get them only through reading; and that ideas in useful book form are practical means toward such an end."

Grouse: "Grant all that, where are you coming out?"

Goode: "Right here, sir: when is the best time for furnishing your mind with these indispensable ideas—when business is booming along on the old lines or when it's flat on its back and needs a tonic like the very devil?"

Grouse: "Um, you've a point there!"

Goode: "There's more to it. For when business is

good you have neither time nor inclination for working at new selling plans; everything's satisfactory as is and why go to any trouble? But when business is bad, you've time on your hands to lay plans for its revival; and how do that to better advantage than by familiarizing yourself with the ideas of the best brains in America? Indeed, how do it otherwise at all? Far from bad times being a deterrent it is the very season above all others when ideas both ought to be laid in and can be absorbed at leisure."

Grouse: "There's something in what you say; and it is true, of course, that if you can show me a reason to buy I can probably hock Mr. Dooit or the office cat for the price. You're getting me warmer; but, after all, why should I take on more reading matter for my men?"

Goode: "Mr. Grouse, if I were asking a busy man to do only that I'd *deserve* to be licked."

Grouse: "Let's see this precious set of books; I suppose you have specimen copies. M'm. Yes, right off the bat, here's an article I like."

Goode: "A pretty good piece, isn't it, with a clinking idea in it?"

Grouse: "Yes, yes, but I've read something like it somewhere; don't want duplications!"

Goode: "Well, now, let's see: rather a detailed and complex idea, wasn't it? How long could you carry it in your head?"

Grouse: "I get you. And if I happen to want to refer to it three months from now I'd be fretting, 'Where in hell did I read that?' Couldn't remember where I'd first seen it. That what you say?"

Goode: "Exactly. At the end of the year you have in our books a permanent accessible record of many of the worth-while ideas of America's best brains—actually a storehouse of those brains."

Grouse: "But how is it going to make me money?"

Goode: "You're not seriously asking me to prove to you that ideas mean money? But even taking your question literally: The salesmen for one big concern in the hardware field did 30 per cent more business after being equipped with these books. One salesman sold a new customer $1,800 worth of merchandise by using an idea you will find on page fifty-one, volume two. You will note that this idea could be applied to virtually every business. This is not an academic set of books, Mr. Grouse, but a record of successful, proved ideas. One of our patrons, tackling the question of how many such proved concrete ideas a given number of pages would contain, listed thirty-eight out of sixty-four pages, or 59 per cent. These pages were chosen at random and may thus be considered representative. Practically 60 per cent of the books consists of successful proved ideas; and 30 per cent of the balance, according to his classification,

conveys statistical and other concrete information which might be plausibly construed as ideas, too."

Grouse: "Seems to prove that point fairly neatly; and it's a good point, too—your best selling point, in fact, since it hits a man flush on the spot where he's most sensitive: on the money-saving-money-making nerve!"

Hurdle IV: The Close

Goode: "When, Mr. Grouse?"

Grouse: "When—what?"

Goode: "When do you want to have these delivered, today or tomorrow?"

Grouse: "Come, that's traveling pretty fast. Sometime, all right; you've got me 'sold'—but where's the hurry? Fifty dollars is half a century, you know; and even $15 for the least expensive binding—you see I've taken the pains to read your price-list—is, well a pair of shoes. Some other day, eh?"

Goode: "Mr. Grouse, you've no duty to me but I've got one to you. That conviction engineered me past Mr. Dooit, stretched the two minutes you were going to give me into a half hour, has us both all het up over a big opportunity. I don't believe $50 is going to turn us back. You want this set of books: providing a permanent, accessible record of the cream of the ideas of the business world; and incorporating hundreds of successful, proved, concrete ideas any one of which may save you hundreds of dollars."

Grouse: "Well, I'll think it over."

Goode: "Mr. Grouse, your secretary dismissed me. You wouldn't talk to anybody. I'm still here. Why, sir? Because you need me, because I know I can help you. You're going to play golf this afternoon—"

Grouse: "How the dickens—"

Goode: "Let me caddy for you!"

Grouse (extending a lusty hand with a thunderous laugh): "You win, boy: give me that contract!"

. . . . . .

No, *Hurdles* didn't save the business. It didn't bridge the "hard times." But it did shoot new pep into hardening arteries, it did re-create that sales force. Enough fresh morale was sucked from it to carry on for another year; and to shrink a considerable prospective loss to a nice rotund zero—the kind of "success" at which no man jeers who has slept with the bogy "Deficit."

CHAPTER 25

SELLING THINGS TO NEW YORK

"Same as selling to Sault Ste. Marie, Buda or Bagdad," is your first-blush comment.

"In essentials, that is," perhaps you've the caution to add. "But the psychology is the same. Selling's just selling, the world over!"

That, observation submits, is not true. At any rate, New York provides the exception. Of course, selling to New York resembles selling to Old York in salient features. But there is one glaring difference, one grand departure, that sets Gotham off from the practice of the rest of the world. As the New Yorker would never put it, his town is *sui generis*—in at least one respect. And that is, the seller's attitude to the person just sold. It is an attitude hard to cram into definition. You might sum it as, Get quick the customer's money, get quicker rid of him—get quickest on to the next. The sloganeer might pack it into, T'ell with the guy you've just sold! Possibly as good an image as could be devised is a sporting one: New York puts a lot on the ball; but in general there's neither the attempt nor the desire to effect the smallest fraction of *follow-through.*

Now that's bad economics. That's not the modern ideal, not by a salesman's mile. In fact, it directly counters the ripe merchandising theory of the moment. Let's not question that theory, please. Let's assume it's right, as right for New York as for Yorkshire York. Can, then, any case be made out for New York's violent discard of a virtually universal formula? Certainly she appears to *thrive;* and it may be *because* she arrogantly upsets established procedure and not in spite of it. That dark horse, *Turnover,* befuddles the best of bookies! It may indeed be that the kaleidoscopic teeming millions of New York justify, even exact, this To-the-devil-with-you-when-I've-got-your-coin attitude.

But all that's beside the point. Whether any other philosophy of the sale could or should affect New York does not concern this present memo. The *fact* is that everywhere but in New York the aim of the vendor is to conserve at all costs a merchandising connection once it is established; and that in New York, at all events in a good majority of instances, exactly the opposite is the case.

One needn't enlarge the first posit of the above proposition. Keep the customer sold, is the *definite article* of the modern business man's book of common-sense syntax. Follow-up letters; tactful memory-jogging announcements; lists combed and scoured methodically; the manufacturer imploring the wholesaler and the

latter the retailer to guard that precious nugget, the individual consumer; advertisements framed to snare the new prospect by adducing proof that the old customer is progressively satisfied: all this apparatus, too well known to need elaboration, directs itself to the nurture and sustenance of the man who has just bought.

Nor is it the tangible product alone that fits into this category. Service, too! And personality! Yes, your politician knows the trick. Many years ago the Memnon of this memo stood in line at a stated handshake-fest in the White House. Finally he confronted the President. There occurred what he could have sworn was a spontaneous lighting up of that mobile face, an intimate envelopment by ignited eyes. Almost he expected the words, "Why, this young man and I know each other well. Don't you remember, boy, that time . . . ?" And then he became aware that the great man's hand, grasping his so warmly and constructively, was none the less irresistibly urging him along and away. Well, of course: that was all right. The President had got to sell himself to the next fellow. But did he *drop* that first young man? Has that first young man ever forgotten the lingering, appropriating handgrip which was so reluctantly passing him on and out? And did he ever vote against him? Rather not! That was inspired personality-salesmanship. That was follow-through!

But what of New York? Does actually New York care a unit damn for the customer after his money has been lured, lifted or lambasted out of him? Is usually any effort made to find out whether the purchase is satisfactory? Is even that minute or two after closing, when every buyer suffers a reactionary moment of doubt and would never forget a congratulatory word from the seller, is even that moment reassuringly shared with the purchaser? Are the latter's sensibilities, which comprise the basic stock-in-trade of the wise merchant, given any sustained consideration by the average New York salesman? Isn't it a fact that New York in the main turns from the buyer with an avidity for the next prospect that is positively indecent, almost contemptuous?

The Memling of this memo was getting a haircut on East 28th Street. It was five o'clock and the pavements were thronged with the human spume from a hundred office buildings. He occupied the first chair, in a window open to and level with the street. The greasy loquacity of the man of shears having been squelched, he wrapped himself round with the rhythms of that overpowering surge and recession of life just outside the window.

Presently a wagon heaped with small crates dashed up to the curb exactly in front of the shop. Almost before the horse had done snorting and the brakes shrieking, the two men on the driver's seat had scram-

bled over among the boxes and—business was business! Tomatoes, a half dozen or so to the box, "given away" at a few cents. One of the men relayed the boxes, tied them up after purchase, said nothing; the other——! Ah, here was New York selling New York at its best—or worst. Certainly at its most characteristic! A circle of gaping people had formed before his mouth gaped for the first squawk. And how that creature could sell! He had but one line, one formula; but he knew his New York and he counted on the psychology of people trained to acceptance—even, it would seem, to admiration—of the "T'ell with the man you've just sold" method. Brutally, by sheer overweening vulgar bellwetherhood, he jammed through sale after sale. And this was his slogan, his magic vocal wand, reiterated without change either of word or of inflection:

"Ooh"—pouncing on each fresh box as it was handed to him—"Look at *this* one!"

(Mark that: could implication be clearer? "This next box—ooh—got the last one beat every way—ooh—tomatoes twice as big, riper, redder—ooh! *Here's* something worth while: *not like that last junk I just sold!*")

Now, that the crowd was falling for this stuff, tumbling over each other to buy, is not, as has been hinted, the point. The point is that this Kick-the-purchaser-out-to-make-room-for-the-next-one practice is standard New York practice. What must the penultimate pur-

chaser have thought if he lingered a moment? Nor is it relevant to observe that in general he didn't linger, that he was propelled out of that circle by the hawker's will, that in fact the hawker was playing for just this disintegration and rematerialization of his audience. But the chap who *did* linger? For him . . . this insolent buffet in the face—and the privilege of toting away a box filled with the veritable dregs of salesmanship!

Yet—here's your wedge of antithesis—how easy it would have been for this hawker to have kept the customer sold in that vital, delicate moment just after the close—the only chance he had, of course, in the circumstances. Nor would he have slowed up his pace in the least. One little word added would have done the trick, sent every purchaser homeward pleased with his buy, brought New York into line with the rest of creation. Why could he not have said: "Ooh—look at this one, *too!*"

Even the newsboys are addicts to this pernicious "T'ell with" habit. How often does it occur to any of them that you may be passing their stand tomorrow night? That you may be of that queer breed of outlander on whom a "Thank you" might be profitably expended? One would think the urchins, smart enough otherwise, could reason that out! But what happens? Count the times you've bought a paper and the vendor hasn't instantly—before he gets your

money, generally—bawled his "Extry, papies" past your shrinking ear, blatantly angling for some other! Never a smile, scarcely ever a glance, much less a word of thanks: always that indecent rage for the next sale, that utter contemptuous disregard of the man just sold!

But (you will object) these are just street-sales, mustn't predicate too boldly, crowded conditions, only so much time, quite natural under the circumstances. You will be tempted also to transplant the hawker and the newsboy to other cities and find them not unidentifiable there. Let's tilt the social plane a bit, then; and see whether this perversion of the sale is "just human nature" cropping out in New York or whether —as the Mentor of this memo holds—it is New York hopping out of line with the practice of all the rest of the selling world.

A young man had been taking his laundry to a pretentious uptown shop. He'd been doing that every week for perhaps six months. Always he dealt with the same shopman who was in fact the only person ever to tend the counter. A background of inarticulate men and women provided gestures of activity. The fellow in charge was articulate enough, but never to his customer. Yet, strangely, it was not till that customer entered—and preferably when he was begging for a delivery date—that the launderer burst into speech. Full in the customer's face—such was his art—he would launch some cryptic remark which could be directed

only to the shadowy audience behind him. The effect of wanton and calculated insolence was choice. Nor did he ever, by so much as the display of one tooth, evince recognition; and he caused that young man to repeat his name and address every time the latter bearded the brute. The customer, inured to New York's special brand of counter-nudity, was rather amused than annoyed. Nor was he minus a sporting wish to discover whether the surly one really *had* any teeth to exercise!

He discovered it—but not by the smile-route. A packet of a few collars was lost. Two weeks faded away. By that time, of course, the laundryman *knew* whose fault it was. The young man had never turned them in! Said the latter, as yet pacific, "But you've admitted all along you quite well remembered my doing so." Then it was the former proved up on the possession of teeth, with a 26-ply snarl and a crown of obscene vocal abuse on every one. . . .

Here, then, was the New York technique at its most virulent. Here was not simply the careless dismissal of a casual customer; but the crass annihilation of a connection profitable enough to justify the semblance of apology with which this customer would have been satisfied. The whole thing seemed to the young man, indeed, too raw even for New York; and he indited a complaint to the proprietor of the shop, not without the suspicion, it is true, that the proprietor and the

roughneck at the counter were one and the same. "Evidently you are going out of business," he wrote, "or such stupid conduct—and so forth." But he received no answer of any kind; and it's three years ago and the shop is still there; and daily the young man spies his antagonist gnashing at him through the window. Only one satisfaction accrues to the quondam customer: the laundryman recognizes him now! . . .

There are even higher planes whereon this fountain of "T'ell with the customer" insouciance cold-douches the just and the unjust—in Gotham. The Mechanician of this memo decided he wanted an automobile. He was canny. Oh, he knew better than to buy a *new* car first. He'd get a secondhand one for economy's sake! So he hied him to the secondhand dealer. Urbane? Never was such a salesman! Nothing he wouldn't do for the M. of this mem.—except, of course, guarantee his wares. Well, obviously: the prices *were* low. You could hardly expect that. And the prospect, assimilating the idea of actually owning and driving a car, gave more heed to what his eye told him of beautiful contours and flawless paint than to the dealer's apparently casual remark that his cars were bought without exception "as is."

The Malaprop of this memo bought what looked like a car. . . .

He will not ask you to accompany him on his first ride. The engine didn't balk. It melted. Nothing but

the brake worked and that wouldn't quit. Three tires blew up in three blocks. The radius-rod evaporated and a queue of small boys trailed the wreck with handfuls of nuts, bolts and bearings which had dripped from its entrails upon the street. The young man, of course, used language; but he strangled the impulse to go back and strangle the vendor. What could he do? He reviewed the sale. Two statements were all he could recall of the suave salesman's inflammatory patter. They both hit him now below the belt. "When you sit in that car your friends will be your enemies and your enemies will be your friends" had been one. *"Sit* in it!" he bleated, aware that that was all he would ever do! The fiendish satirical cleverness of that verb! Not a word could he now recall of *performance;* and of course the infernal engine had run like a dream on the floor of the garage. Then the second statement of Mr. Oily Secondhand: that little idle, almost whimsical, "Of course, cars are sold *as is."* Fatal words! No, he'd no redress; he'd just been stung, must lap up his medicine.

But there *was* something he remembered that made him see *rationally* red. And that recollection swings into line with the thesis of this memo. It had been just another exhibition of New York's Cold-shoulder-the-customer-just-sold manner. When he'd written his check back there in the shop, what a change had come over that urbane salesman! The victim recalled it with

swelling wrath, as he wriggled out of his beautiful "sitting" car. Hadn't the fellow just dropped him, though! His manner had turned to one of leering repulsion. No more ecstatics! He'd brushed aside the young man's futile but quite natural desire to chin over the deal a bit more, to extract a final and riveting reassurance that he'd made a good buy. "Why should he nurse a boob after he'd got his money?" the young man now realized his manner had only too plainly said. Importantly and offensively, he'd bustled away to the front of the shop where not another customer but a man who looked like a blackleg and probably was a bootlegger bagged his ear while the young man made a scratch getaway in his new "car" with the help of a grinning mechanic. . . .

Analyze this tragi-comedy, now, with our antithetic method. You may say, of course: "Oh, the dealer was a crook; played for a nitwit and got him. Why should he festoon the deal? He knew that car would fall apart, and the more he felicitated the customer the more come-back he'd have to face." But is that the true psychology? Grant that the dealer knew his wares weren't even second-rate secondhand; grant that he depended on turnover alone and realized he couldn't expect a customer to "come again." Grant all this and yet you have him acting the part of a dumbbell. For after all he was in business and presumably expected to remain in business; and no such servant of the public

can afford to ignore that old retainer, "Good-will." Think what a little congratulatory word, a cheery "good-luck" (outwardly genuine, at least, no matter how ironical within), would have done toward salving the disappointment and disarming the reminiscent fury of that young man! True, it probably wouldn't have brought him back to buy another car; but it would have kept his tongue from wagging inimically whenever that dealer and that dealer's nefarious traffic entered a conversation. For the young man would have reasoned something like this:

"Oh, he didn't mean to 'do' me. Nobody ever knows what the real condition of a used car is. 'S always a gamble. That fellow couldn't be expected to make good, of course, but he's all right, himself." And though, being full-grown and not a confirmed boob, that customer wouldn't have returned, at any rate *he wouldn't have dissuaded other people from going there, as he now does.*

That's the nub of the whole thing. With a little judicious feeding of natural customer-vanity that dealer would have scored a follow-through which would have triumphed over even the cataclysm on the boulevard. Foolish of the dealer? Rather: but isn't it characteristic, now? Doesn't the average New York salesman say, in effect: "Huh, the supply of suckers is inextinguishable —what's the use of paying any attention to the guy you've just sold?"

Still, you object, this is the vulgar, the *little* salesman. What about the more rarefied strata of commerce? Well, you're not going to pull Wall Street on me in rebuttal, are you? . . . This memo-hound stops here, however. Maybe selling a mill, a railroad or a city ward brings into the picture a different psychology. Somehow one doubts it, though. . . . Of course, there is enlightened, constructive selling in New York, particularly among agents and firms that dispense service. But aren't these firms oases in the great waste of "T'ell-with" practice? And *aren't they in fact so regarded* by those who are fortunate or discerning enough to unearth them?

It would be tempting to amplify the hint of some paragraphs back and discuss whether it's not actually New York's apparent willingness to be tweaked by the nose that has converted the town into a congeries of tweakers? Is this New York depravity, in short, cause or effect? Certainly New York pedestals, rather than pillories, the man who "gets away with murder." But into that blind alley this memo shall not meander.

There's a certain infamous line from a once popular Broadway play. It's a line which epitomizes all that is cynical, ruthless and insolent. It tears into shreds the Golden Rule and makes an egregious hash out of the alleged humanities. Slightly off the rails of our present consideration, it nevertheless sheds no little light on it. For though the sentiment is intrinsically monstrous,

does New York flinch? Is she shocked? A whiff apologetic even while cerebrally relishing it? To the contrary. New York eats it up, gobbles it rapturously, washes it down its rapacious gullet with draughts of frenzied applause. Why? For what possible reason save that it expresses New York, strikes the master-chord? And, by the same token, serves to explain much of the ostensible mystery latent in what we have been scrutinizing as Gotham's "T'ell with the customer" attitude.

The line, with its unholy arraignment of a city that consents to it with cheers, may serve as the capstone as well as the touchstone of this memo. It runs:

"Never give a sucker an even break."

CHAPTER 26

CAN THE CANNED APPROACH!

Radical? No doubt. But—let's see.

"Once our salesmen," writes "General Sales Manager" in a recent magazine article, "get inside the president's office, they get down to business instantly. *They have a memorized talk—"*

Canned patter! An almost universal practice: granted. But is it sound? Isn't it on the contrary quite the most crushing handicap a salesman can saddle himself with? It is true the article goes on to say, ". . . no one would know it is a canned talk." But that's not the point.

Stock patter has a stultifying effect *on the salesman.*

It makes him inelastic, unready, helpless if the prospect wrests the word from him. Nothing is easier to puncture than the swelling front of this type of salesman. A deft executive can have him *hors de combat* in thirty seconds by merely feinting with an irrelevant question. More, this method presupposes a dead-level mental uniformity among prospects, and that's as suicidal as it is idiotic. Worse yet, the canned approach is a confession of timidity, of inferiority, a dependence not

on native wit but on borrowed brains. Finally, the salesman who enters primed with memorized patter *is thinking of himself and not of his prospect*—thus fatally missing his one golden chance to size up that prospect and square his own appeal with the individual psychology of the other chap.

Several years ago I was drawn on a "murder" jury. The defending attorney had a "stock" question with which he touched up each member of the panel. He varied neither phraseology nor inflection. "Have you any conscientious scruples against capital punishment?" Never once did it occur to him to change his phrasing. Banged away monotonously with that canned question. What was the result? Well, I won't affirm that he prejudiced the jury against his client, although he would have lost one man at least had I been forced to serve. But what he did do was to declare himself eligible to defeat as unimaginative, inaggressive and imitative: without spark of either originality or audacity. I doubted that he could sell his client's innocence to the judge with that type of mind. And I *knew*—and here we get back to our salesman—that his reliance on "stock" question and "stock" thinking would leave him at the post in any race where nerve and address and spontaneity were entered.

Quick thinking on the feet—*impromptu* thinking—is an asset as vital to lawyer or salesman as to pugilist or ball-player. How are you going to develop it unless

you give your man his head? How generate initiative unless you encourage him to *inish!* This doesn't mean he's not to know his subject exhaustively, or be unable to rattle it off at will when the time comes. It *does* mean he's not asked to plunge at once into patter before he has the ghost of an idea of his prospect's mental displacement. That's destructive, nine times in ten—or at any rate only tepidly effective; the salesman is endured instead of being bowed out. And when he's out he's out—out of courage and out of resourcefulness—because he has never been taught to think for himself.

If, at this point, the stock-approach manager exclaims, "Your idea would require supermen," I should retort that it's supersalesmen he's after, isn't it? And even at that I should take issue with him since, for the one man he would lose who hadn't the necessary brains-plus-spunk, he would gain two who could develop it on this sink-or-swim program—and who would qualify just about 1,000 per cent quicker. Or, if he should assert that he has supersalesmen anyhow, I should ask him: What of their successors? And how much would a formula be worth that could take raw material and turn it into supersalesmen at a fraction of the current cost in time and money?

Yes, even with green cubs, once sure they knew their subject and could answer all questions, I should recommend dropping the canned approach. Have them wipe their minds clean at the prospect's door, prepared to

give the first vital half-minute to concentrated study of their man. Then—talk! And they'll uncover a freedom and a rapid-fire facility they never enjoyed when trying to clamp all prospects into one undeviating mold. At first it may be tough sledding. They'll score a few disastrous gulping failures. But soon—the miracle! There'll be no more mumbling the opening speech with one quaking hand on a terrorizing door-knob. (Oh, yes; I've been a salesman myself as well as—on a modest scale—a handler of salesmen.) Head high and brain alert to pounce, they'll have the prospect sized up in a jiffy, will have the liberating privilege of meeting him on his own ground of impromptu give-and-take.

It really stands to reason, doesn't it? What would you think of a football team that opened every game with the same choice of plays? Not only would other teams soon become devastatingly wise, but—more deadly still—that outfit itself would go mentally stale. On both counts, it would lose games.

If I were asked to nominate the master salesman of my acquaintance I should pick one of the big guns of—Advertising! A. W. Erickson's forensic power lies in his genuine spontaneity. So far as I know he never made a set speech in his life—indeed, asserts that he couldn't; yet stronger and more logical talks than he gives ex tempore you seldom hear. Of course, he prepares his *subject;* but I'm convinced he never entered a conference or presided over a meeting with any prior

calculation as to how he would phrase his message. And because he is thus unhampered, he is eloquent; because his mind is concentrated on his audience, he electrifies that audience.

Let your salesmen, then, empty their minds of the set opening speech. Let them fling their hearts over the hurdle of the big man's threshold and they'll attain both speech and the big man's ear. Don't let them try to compel speech by hedging it within memorized limits. If they are too timid at first, let them practice several diversified presentations of their major selling points. But for the approach—not a stock line, not a stock word! Urge them to give themselves to the occasion spiritedly, boldly, their minds wide open to the prospect's individuality, ready to seize the silent lead he is unconsciously offering them; and they'll find that the gift of tongues will descend on them.

Moreover, they'll multiply their sales.

CHAPTER 27

"LAUGH, PAGLIACCIO!"

AN IDEA OFFERED NOW *FOR NOTHING* TO THE INDUSTRIAL AND ADVERTISING WORLD WHICH WAS UNRESPONSIVE TO IT FINANCIALLY IN 1912

Put your overcoat on, back foremost. Stand on your head. Extend your left foot instead of your right hand and meet—

The First Person in advertising. That is, advertisements framed in the first person instead of the second or third. Not personifications, like "I am the Printing-press." Not quotations. Not unsigned testimonials, faked or genuine. But advertisements read by me as "I" instead of by me as "You." The sales message transformed at one stroke from a didactic statement by somebody else to a soliloquy by my very own self!

The idea states itself simply enough, is not perhaps at first blush either startling or confounding; but think for a moment of its implications and of its scope.

Perhaps you will then hail a new philosophy.

The passion for novelty in advertising is a driving impulse. New modes of presenting old commodities

are caught up eagerly; fresh turns of phrase, shifts in graphic picturization, are in noisy demand. The price business will pay for the novel idea is measured by the table which measures business cupidity: which is to say, it has no limits.

But this is in the field of Applied Science, is a matter of mechanics, does not rise above the substitution of one sameness for another. If, therefore, on this unsubtle plane, a king's ransom is held not excessive reward for a fresh inspiration, what value must attach to an idea which invades the domain of Pure Science with a ruthless and stunning transfer of personality itself? Could anything be more arresting? More compulsory? Could not the man who introduced so fundamental and searching a change flatter himself on achieving the last and definitive novelty, which should rush his competitors to the wall?

It is axiomatic that virtually all the inventions, conventions and contraptions of civilization start wrong; that, after harassing and expensive experiment with the toys and the tools of humanity, we generally find that they should have been constructed exactly backward. Thus, the engine of the motor car for a score of reasons should be at the rear of the vehicle; and so on. But alas, when this painful fact is realized, there is usually a billion dollars of equipment which would have to be sacrificed to reconstruction—and the world swings on at the original tangent.

And even more difficult to change than the physique of habit is its soul. The "good old way" prejudice is so nearly unuprootable that most metaphysical gardeners never wave a spade at it. Because advertising has always moved on second and third person lines a suggestion to throw it with one cosmic wrench into the first will seem to the static "ninety-nine" a sheer pipe-dream.

It is, of course, precisely because of this constitutional attitude of the world that the world could be counted on to "sit up and take notice." Moreover, this revolution could be accomplished quite bloodlessly, so far as the machinery of the past is concerned. All the world will have to do is to turn around three times and come up smiling to meet itself.

Apply this theory now, practically—for if it does not stand up under test it is patently no discovery at all—and see where we emerge. Try, therefore, certain specimens; and, first, some primitive transmutations which yet have the vital impact of the new philosophy:

1. THE TYPEWRITER I SHALL BUY TODAY!
2. GRAPE-CORN ought to be good for me: I'M reasonable!
3. Can the GOSSAMER TWINS do MY work? Goodness knows, there's enough of it! I'll just try 'em.

4. I want "the varnish that won't turn white" in MY home!

So much for a fugitive specimen or two from our Primer. Let us mount, now, into more ambitious realms and try our teeth on a life insurance kernel:

5. I'm getting nearer to forty than I ever intended to,—without providing for wife and children. I admit of course that Life Insurance is a good thing. And, yes, I can afford it. Why on earth, then, shouldn't I take out a Policy,—and why not *today?* Tomorrow always comes to the uninsured. I'll do it. I may live to be ninety but—I *mean* to be insured in the Wanderers Life Insurance today.

Here, you see, we have struck boldly afield of our imitative A B C's, and may be said to be in full stride of the new art. Could anything be at the same time simpler and more ingratiating? Has advertising, in fact, ever developed any *métier* one-half so intimate? Let us take now a shy at verse:

6. (Figure of Mr. Mercury)
I really suppose that I am not as fleet
As this person depicted with wings on his feet;

But if I with Michigan tires were shod
Why then I'd go faster than any old god.

Or try this:

7. I can't grow old *too* fast so long as I've got

SPLINTERED WHEAT

to "grow old along with me." . . . As the creator of Ariel put it, There's a breakfast-food in the experience of men which taken with cream leads on to health. In fact, I do not see how, in partnership with Splintered Wheat, I can grow old at all.

Now this:

8. Why shouldn't I follow the Day-Belt to the Orient? The Far East invites me, me personally, to new scenes and a new life. Why not accept? I really haven't any other engagements half so alluring.

Or this:

(Cut of Biscuit package)

9. *I* need it!

But enough of illustrations. Obviously they could be extended *ad libitum*. The formula is yours. Do you want it? Perhaps—the advertising of the future? Dare

you—no, dare I? Come, which is it to be? . . . Third, Second—*First!* And then: Zero? Well, what would a million dollars look like without its zeros? Hope possesses the author (3rd pers.) that you (2nd pers.) are by now excitedly chanting: "Great idea: shall I confess to originating it?"

CHAPTER 28

BUSINESS HAS FEET, TOO

Business has wings, cries a recent writer. Wings of imagination and romance that sweep it high above its former levels! Mighty pinions dare a new orbit. Modern captains of industry route all their mental shipments through the air. The tilts and the triumphs of commerce take place on ethereal plateaus where not even the sky is the limit.

But—

Grant that the achievements of modern business take the breath. Thrill to the crescendo of that whirr of wings. Gasp at the sensations of the pilot on his dizzy arc. Don't you wind up by asking yourself, "What after all has that to do with me? I'm sitting here at an obscure desk or pounding the pavements trying to sell goods. Oh yes, I'm proud of my firm and its 300 miles an hour up there in the clouds—but all I'm doing is to slog along down here in the dust or out in the sticks on my own little puny job. I guess I'm not contributing very darned much to that horse-power!"

You wouldn't get economists to indorse that view. For there's another side to this aerial picture and plenty of warrant for reversing the layout. And breath-taking,

fancy-filling, as is the motif of the wings, there's at least as much to stir the imagination in what that other side of the picture discloses.

Rest your eyes, now, from the undoubtedly dazzling picture of Business as a great pinioned craft cleaving the air. Put your ear to the ground. What's that thunderous though muffled sound which rises to challenge first and then to drown out the winged roar overhead? Why, nothing but the marching feet of salesmen, thousands upon thousands; nothing but the hum of a million typewriters; nothing but the murmur of merchandise, multiplied infinitely, moving here and there throughout the world; nothing but the shock of tons and tons of printed advertisements set down daily in city and town; nothing but the crash of pennies on the counters of myriad neighborhood stores.

Business has wings, yes; but it has feet too. And the feet come ahead of the wings. Nor alone chronologically. Except for the feet of Business, there had never been, it is true, any flight at all; but it's also true that, except for that steady march and countermarch, now, this very moment, the pinioned craft would come ignominiously down. That's how much you at your desk and you pounding the pavements dedicate to the horsepower which is driving the world; and that's why you're entitled to feel that though Business has wings it has other extremities which are going somewhere too.

With one great division of these humble feet of Business you are invited to keep step for a few moments. Yes, quite literally, with the feet, the million feet of salesmen—the rumor of whose passing rose in your ear against the voice of the giant wings.

II

Nothing new, you demur, in ascribing the success of a business largely to its salesmen. Granted. But what may be new to many is the thesis that in this pedestrian prerequisite to flight there may be as much glamor and color and poetry as attend that flight. This angle one seldom sees stressed. Thousands of words, indeed, are printed annually on the problems of salesmanship and of salesmen. But in general the magazines that "handle" this material have the trade-paper slant. They treat concrete problems, concretely. The *psychology* of the salesman is not invaded. In these articles feet are very pedestrian indeed. What the new evaluations have done in calling attention to the winged properties of Business as a whole seems not yet to have been accomplished for the salesman. It is the aim of this reply, therefore, to submit that not only has Business feet as well as wings and that those feet are shod with power; but that they are *tipped, heel and toe, with romance.* If you think a minute you'll realize that of course no business ever flew before it mastered

its first stumbling efforts to walk. Grudgingly, then, you may be willing to admit that feet aren't necessarily to be pitied because they aren't wings. But that's not enough, not nearly enough. Let's test out the idea that salesmanship is more than just one of the humble drudgeries, that it's more even than a proud consciousness of indispensability—that, in short, salesmanship has intrinsically winged feet!

To begin with, there can be little doubt that the salesman pursues the most adventurous career open to mankind today. Is there any job, or any avocation, that's even half so crowded with adventures? Hunting wild game isn't a patch on hunting cold prospects. For you can pretty well know in advance what your jungle quarry will do and just exactly how to bring him down; but to tackle a financial pachyderm in his lair—ah, that's *worthy* of a Nimrod. Moreover, a successful salesman's bag contains any number of totally different species, each one with its own particular tactics, defenses, feints, counter-attacks and lines of retreat. He lands a Wall Street Bear in desperate hand-to-hand conflict in an office on Hanover Square; then, after lunch, stalks a crafty crop-eared Bull through the canyons around Bowling Green. Danger all about him. Carnivora crouch behind every door. He never lays hand on knob (while out on a cold canvass) without that response of the nerves that daunts yet in the end

exalts the born hunter's spirit. Where else would you find adventure so exciting and so manifold?

And suppose he misses the charging game? Keeps on missing him while the latter gathers all his repellent energies? Well, he will be clawed, that's all. Or flattened. Eternal vigilance, poise, nerve; quick protective, quicker offensive, footwork—all these things the "cold turkey" salesman packs in his kit ready for instant use. (Obviously, it's this cold canvass salesman, *not* the "red-hot lead" chap, that collects the swiftest adventures.)

What will he find back of this next door? Down, floor by floor, from the top of some office building, he's been working. Here's the long empty corridor. No forest aisle could be more silent—or more ominous. Door after door, each shutting him definitely out; yet each a challenge and a promise. An elevator sky-rockets past, stops with a clang at the floor above. He is relieved, for he's not yet ready to make a plunge and would be further unnerved by a gush of people who were manifestly and purposefully going somewhere. Yet his vacillation is not wholly unpleasant. This is an unexplored country, it is true, with disaster lurking in any quarter; but orders—orders!—are here for the skillful and the bold. Where had he best strike first?

Nonchalantly—for any one of these offices may any moment disgorge men in his face, and a salesman must not be caught reading doors—he saunters along the hallway, analyzing, balancing and submitting to hunch

the various painted names which fence him out. Hm, JOHN K. PLYMAN—just that and nothing more. Now, what and who is *he?* A lawyer, perhaps. Fair prospect, in that case—but only fair. Every lawyer ought to have the S O S Service! Sure. That's what the sales manager's always braying; but try to sell 'em. Oh well, anyhow, this bird sticks up his name, and it's easier to make a bluff at a guy's business if you can keep your tongue on his name than to horn your way into the big executive when all you know *is* his business. Besides, maybe it's only just Plyman himself, a nice snug office with him sitting in plain view and no outer office gate to crash. That pulls. That tempts. Little old line of least resistance. Perhaps Plyman wouldn't invest, but would give a fellow a seat and a pleasant razz and chat. Wait a minute, though. Business. No, he can't afford either the time or the moral let-down which that lure involves. Already he feels stealing over him the sweet yet dreaded lassitude of the will that keeps the average salesman poor. If he's so ready to entertain the idea of wasting an hour now, by two o'clock he'll be counting four hours a day. Let him tackle a big office, an organization proposition, where the going will be rough but where he can "shoot at" selling his Service not in singles but in hundreds. Jot Plyman down, yes—but later, later. Big game, first, while the day's young and courage can be tapped—or this floor'll likely be a total loss.

Ah, there you are. At the end of the corridor. AMERICAN FINANCE ASSOCIATION, New York, Detroit, Omaha, Los Angeles. Oh yes, he'd known they were right there all along, known he'd got to break in there—or own himself licked. Well, he really hadn't been kidding himself for more than a minute or two. A fellow was entitled to that! But wouldn't you think they would put the manager's name on the door? Should he make a note of this outfit, look up the personnel—and come back after lunch? That would be the intelligent thing to do but—again that stir of pleasure along relaxed nerves. No, back out he won't. And anyhow, all you had to do to top the high barriers was throw your heart over and somehow the rest of you went over too. He'd made the grade more than once that way—and so—pooh, you wouldn't look cross-eyed at a doorknob if you *knew* what was on the other side. Adventure! Whoops, let's go.

Then the hazards begin. But the hunter is now mentally and spiritually prepared, is now consciously at his best. Whether to victory or defeat, he rides in—a victor. Bring on your dragons, he exults. And that first conquering glance skewers perhaps—a gum-chewing office-boy behind a rail. Well, what of it? Just the first step to trip up or trip up on, as the case may be. And if it wasn't this cub it would be a young woman, also doubtless grinding gum; or, if neither, some stuffed-shirt of a clerk whose severe demand for credentials

might inopportunely predict a freezing reception by the boss. Oh, the great adventure is launched!

Now, there are many ways for the salesman to inflect his "Open Sesame." Every imaginative solicitor has several at his tongue's tip. If this were just another sales manual instead of a rhapsody, a review of the wily devices salesmen use to "get in" to the big executive might here be in order. But let's suppose him keen enough to "pull" the right one and win past the gate. Let's concede that he will know how to surmount the acid and formidable, "Have you an appointment?" Or, by easy and unsuspected stages, pump Cerberus until he gets the name of the person with whom he *would* have made an appointment had he not wanted to reach him without delay on a mutual friend's tip that A. F. A. was angling for information he himself had just laid hands on. Let's grant that he can bemuse the "gate" to the extent of acquiring the name he wants without appearing either to want it or to lack it; and that he has the wit or the brass to outface that most pompous yet most easily riddled excuse, "Sorry, he's in conference." (Even the tyro salesman knows how much that's worth!) Let's discount the chance that the pestiferous and skeptical private secretary will lay him by the heels. Thus, at length, in he gets—thanks, in part at least, to the voltaic energy generated by that session with his soul in the corridor; and the big executive looks up from his desk with the blank stare

of the man who more than suspects you are going to snatch at some of his very own dollars.

III

Accrues now to the salesman a sharper excitement, a more ardent awareness of the challenge of opportunity. The adventure soars into a higher curve. In this rarer air he is definitely above the need of playing tricks, of weaving crafty ingenuities. The stalking is accomplished. He's within range. It's man-to-man stuff. And he feels rising within him a new order of courage, shifts into position a new set of mental weapons. For consider what a tremendous job he is about to attack. Here's a man who doesn't know him from Adam and whom he doesn't know from Noah—the latter handicap being, of course, much the heavier. He's starting literally at scratch, without an inkling of the prospect's temperament, habits, disposition; ignorant whether he'll bark, snap or laugh at him—or, worst possibility of all, listen with empty cold eye surrounded by lax face. The salesman must analyze this man instantly, diagnose his probable reaction to the several different "approaches" at his own command and pick the precisely right one of those "approaches." Not a minute to waste, either. For, remember, he's in that office only on sufferance; he wasn't wanted there; his insistence on an interview has doubtless annoyed more

than one intermediary on the way thither and the big man has had this vexation transmitted to him either by word or by eyebrow.—Starting at scratch? Indeed, he's starting 'way behind scratch!

Moreover, the executive is a busy man—busy right now. His mind is full of his own concerns. He might, conceivably, side-track those concerns for a man who appeared with gifts in his hands; but what chance has a fellow who wants *his* money? There's not a thing this salesman can say—for salesman he is by the cut of him and by the agile way he skinned past all the outside traps without revealing his business—not a thing he can say that the prospect can't discount. Logically, too. For it *is* an impertinence to appropriate another man's time; it's monstrous impudence to tell him, as the salesman will, that he doesn't know how to run his own business—or, at least, that without the salesman's product his business isn't functioning 100%. And all this without the shadow of indorsement or introduction, without even an apology. Just look at this puppy splashing in with a smile that's itself the crowning effrontery because it takes for granted what the smiler knows is 100% *not* the case, namely, that the prospect is glad to see him!

Certainly, if the series of this sort of confrontation that is the salesman's daily stint doesn't spell adventure and romance, the words aren't in the dictionary. For, of course, the more nearly handicaps are insurmount-

able the more brilliantly they refresh the spirit when they are overcome. A sale made under these clamping conditions replenishes both character and that will to succeed whose need of replenishment is what makes it prevail. And that tingling, half-shrinking minute back there in the corridor, though it may repeat itself a hundred times, never loses either its thrill of potential victory or its actual content of power-building demand.

IV

But there is an even sterner aspect of this daily confrontation of salesman and prospect that makes for the former's exuberant spirit-health. For it isn't enough that the salesman has forced or wriggled his way into the sanctum; it's not enough, even, that he staves off ejection for one minute or ten or wins a polite, "Perhaps—some other day." No, he must *sell* this prospect: sell him against his visible determination not to be sold, against his determination fortified by all the paraphernalia of repleteness and sufficiency and power that office and official represent. In other words, despite the palpable strength of the prospect and in face of a reluctance that appears virtually invincible, he must make the prospect do what he wills him to do—in short, must prove himself the better man. He, an unsupported pygmy, must take this scornful giant into camp. That's something to "shoot at," isn't it? That's

enough to kindle any man's spirit, wouldn't you say? —and keep it burning higher and yet higher as the odds against him stiffen or he begins to whittle them down. To impose one's will on another calls for a blend of resourcefulness and audacity that isn't concocted by a drudge or a lackey; and contradictorily enough the prospect, who does the drinking, is not the one that gets the biggest "kick" out of the draught. Romance in the salesman's job? Ay, intoxication!

Of course, he doesn't always win. Some horses can be led to water and then, Behold, mules. But even a total-blank day wouldn't blunt the point that the feet of salesmanship are actually wings. For only by the constant recrudescence of courage and *élan* can the salesman hope ever to make a sale; and whether he scores once a day or once a week that recrudescence in itself is stoking the fire of his spirit and cutting loose its tongues of romance. Whether he wins often or infrequently, he is kept unintermittently on his toes—and that's the nearest thing to flight man ever achieves by his own power.

You've sat at your desk of security and static responsibility too long, perhaps, to try putting yourself in the salesman's place. If you ever mentally swap jobs, it's probably to congratulate yourself that you don't have to be "one of them." But search your mind honestly. Isn't your reason for that conclusion tinged with *fear?* Wouldn't you shrink from doing what he must

do? Doesn't your aversion smack of inhibition? And isn't that a negative admission that the salesman possesses a courage which you lack—or at all events would dread submitting to test? *There's* a line of self-scrutiny for the man who avers that the salesman's life must be a sterile and monotonous grind. No. The salesman tramples a fear that you have never grappled with—and by that much is nearer than you are to fearlessness. And what but fearlessness is it that makes men free?

Of course, it's that fearlessness, too, that makes more fearful men do his will. But that's a side-issue. The prospect is only the *background* of our portrait. Thus we may be permitted to avoid that détour, though it's a particularly seductive one—and perhaps revolutionary as an explanation of the astonishing victories of salesmanship. What fearlessness effects toward the liberation of the salesman's spirit, toward his own joy of living, his own reception of romance—that's the route of this inquiry. And can one doubt that the effect is maximum? That the salesman climbs peaks where most men traverse valleys? That more free air blows round him than enfolds most men? That the kaleidoscopic *mélange* of change, risk, and triumph over odds that comprises his life makes for color and glamor and romance? The homely and manifest attributes of successful career also are packed in his kit: patience, tolerance, persistence, ability to laugh at himself. But the

prospect, too, may possess this list. What the salesman has that the prospect hasn't——

Well, is it the winged sandals of that son of Zeus and Maia who was, you recall, in his own right both the god of commerce and the god of eloquence?

CHAPTER 29

WHITHER COPY?

A CHAPTER CONTRIBUTED TO A HYPOTHETICAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE FUTURE OF ADVERTISING

A prophet is not without honor save in his own—specialty. The parody goes for a lot of human activities, but particularly for any that wield the creative function in some form or other—and most of all, perhaps, for advertising copy writing.

"No one knows less about copy than copy writers": the quotes have been hung up on that statement by a large and vociferous body of assorted critics. "Good craftsman but——!" "Only a literary man!" "Does this baby realize what advertising pages are *for?*" These outcries have a familiar ring.

Please don't read bitterness, or even cynicism, into the above. Least of all, flippancy. For there's more than a grain of truth in the indictment. Facts can, it is true, be mustered which, to a considerable extent, vindicate the copy writer, just as they tend to whitewash other creative artists. Those facts are (1) that few creative

artists in *any* line are confident judges of their own product; (2) that accordingly most creative artists are *unwilling* judges of their own product, inclined to defer rather than to differ; (3) specifically, that copy writing lacks unanimous criteria, cannot be "scientifically" forecast, is, in the last analysis, theory pure and simple. All this, however, is just a dignified way of admitting that the average copy writer is no very hot judge of copy. For who "knows less" about anything than the man who realizes that he'll never know it all; and where is the theoretician who hasn't thrown himself on the mercy of the "practical" man, though later he may wish he hadn't?

When, therefore, a copy writer is asked to foretell the future of an art which he practices today with so little polemical confidence—in which he has taken so many lickings both from the blue pencil of more or less enlightened authority and from the knowledge of his own "wise" uncertainty—when such a wretch is asked to *prophesy,* can you wonder that he throws up his hands?

And a prophet's job is to throw out his chest, isn't it?

Enough, however, of expostulation and blush. The water looks cold and is undoubtedly deep; but shivers on the springboard never yet made any aquatic dent—or much of a hit with the spectators. Let's

plunge, then, with what cleanness and "form" we can command, hoping that, if we come up, the gallery won't mistake a modest trudgen for a "crawl."

II

First, just what are we to discuss under this head of "Copy"? "Copy" means different things to different minds. For some the word embraces the whole advertisement, "picture," headline, text. Others limit "Copy" to headline and text; still others except the headline. Perhaps it would be well to record here the principle that Harry Dwight Smith so constructively elucidates, viz., that no single one of these elements monopolizes the ideal advertisement. Although, for the purposes of this article, we may feel privileged to sink considerations of layout, illustration, color support, typography, let's agree that advertising copy which is to do a sound commercial job can't stand alone. And then let's go ahead with our prophetic mission as if in fact it can and does stand alone!

For this particular attempt to probe the future should, it seems safe to assume, concern itself only with copy as text (permitting that word to cover the main body of the advertisement, headline, incidental captions). Suppose, therefore, we ask leave to boil the definition down to the single syllable: Words. The words of advertising, the words the advertisement uses,

copy *writing*. What is to be the future of the *written* part of the advertisement?

Well, that decision, if acceptable, clears the deck somewhat. But another application of the mop seems to be indicated. You may be willing to construe copy as the words of the advertising message; but what *kind* of word-copy? Newspaper, magazine, business-paper, direct-mail, billboard, other classifications? For there are differences among these blood relatives! Obviously, however, specific treatment of each *genre* is not within the physical scope of a brief chapter—or, perhaps, desirable anyhow. Let's be autocratic, then, and take magazine copy as representative, with an implied marginal affiliation of the newspaper variant.

Two things more and that deck should be ready for the manœuvres:

1. Shall we agree that while, perhaps, any copy will "go" if there's a big enough appropriation back of it, the copy in whose future we are interested is not lavishly subsidized but must make its own running; and

2. This "prophecy" pledges itself to deal with what the forecaster thinks the future of copy will be, not with what he thinks it *ought* to be. No doctrinairism, in other words.

Bugle call, now. Assembly of candidates for the future monopoly of advertising copy. Some of these candidates bear labels, which indeed we're going to

strip off but which require a cursory inspection first. Here's a group the members of which are neatly ticketed with the names of This and That well-known advertising agency. But the labels don't mean anything, except perhaps to the antiquarian. Nor are the wearers fooled. They know there's no such critter as Thompson, Batten or Erickson copy, any more than there's such a thing as an infallibly spottable Castilian, Cuban or Chilean. Or, at any rate, that if any such advertising rubber-stamp is in the making, it will not become currency. For, that the copy of the future will be broader and more universal than the "school" of any individual pioneer—that no man or organization will ever corner the copy market which is now fermenting—is another of the postulates we are going to try to agree on. Overboard, then, with this particular set of insignia.

But here are some other badges, not to be tossed so easily: "Celebrity-testimonial or Pliable Personality copy," "Snobbery-motivated copy," "Science-to-order copy," "Health or Utopia copy," "Fear or Gehenna copy," and that insidious newcomer which might be called "Sleight-of-hand copy"—tricking the reader by a startlingly irrelevant lead. Is any one of these to become the regnant copy of the future? A negative answer is submitted here, also. First, because of that breadth and universality already claimed for tomorrow's copy product that would rule out any domination

by a particular mode or *genre;* but mainly because the chief *characteristic* of that copy product—and we may as well, at this point, give it its family name, Sincerity, Sincerity in its double sense of honest facts and an honest presentation of those facts—will keep each of the above "types" from ever becoming the type.

Could there be, indeed, any stronger argument against the possible usurpation of Advertising by the kinds of copy cited than the argument which invests that single, simple word—Sincerity? If we can come to agree that greater sincerity will hall-mark the copy of the future (or, better still, that nothing which *isn't* sincere, demonstrably sincere, will be tolerated), why worry unduly about the "menace" of any particular "incorrigible" of the moment? Automatically, this posit would squeeze the "water" out of Testimonial copy, suppressing the palpably shaky purchased variety and leaving the legitimate "secured" genuine article (or genuine-*sounding* article, whether solicited or not, if the indorser is an actual user or exemplar and *says so himself*). Neither the questionable ethics of the fake testimonial nor the argument that its apparent success justifies it will be an issue in the bloodless revolution which is destined, under the leadership of Gen'l Sincerity, to give Advertising something both more ethical and more profitable.

So with the other "pretenders." Why be distressed over the alleged vulgarity, and therefore ominous

cheapening of Advertising, involved in the so-called snobbery appeal? In company with the sea-captain whose craving for a cigarette could scarcely wait till he got back to his ship, the young women sneering at other people's luggage, and the "society" group gloatingly awaiting the downfall of the self-taught pianist, will gradually pass on. *Not* because this kind of snobbery-picture might be condemned as vulgar or at best in poor taste, but merely because it isn't a *true* picture. Things like that don't happen. You don't go round looking for things to deride, if for no higher reason than that you've enough to bother about with your own concerns. Your reaction to such futilities is, therefore, contempt for the credulity of the advertiser—and, in general, as a fairly logical corollary, for his product. Thus the tide of a scrupulous common-sense sincerity, long overdue to rise, will obliterate the snob appeal together with all the other false or distorted portraits of human nature.

Pseudo-scientific propaganda, patently ridiculous health claims and exaggerated fear copy will be swamped also—for the same reason and just as painlessly; while the Now-you-see-it-and-now-you-don't sort of thing—the ardent visions of a happy wedding day, for example, condensing (with the last line) into house-heating, or the "whoopee" of musical instruments transposed into coated paper—will go under without a

gasp when once the advertiser perceives that sales and sincerity-in-copy begin with the same letter.

Let's assume, then, that we've cleared the deck of "types" and are left with a hypothetical family or caste whose patronymic is Sincerity. A question, however, at once arises: Is there actually a *present* trend to a more sincere brand of advertising copy—a trend sufficiently definite to warrant a prediction of ultimate broad acceptance? Or is this supposition merely a defensive gesture against certain ills of the moment? For the purposes of prophecy it certainly isn't enough that here is indubitably something which would cure those ills. No, *testimony* should be adduced that Advertising is becoming backfire-conscious, is beginning to perceive the dollars-and-cents need of changing its spark-plugs; and that the Sincerity plug is being increasingly self-prescribed. Space will not permit an adequate handling of this point, although that the "revolution" is indeed on its way is submitted here as the veritable hinge of this "Whither" study. The predominance which *facts* are assuming in advertising means that if it means anything, as we shall see in a moment. Before, however, we root our general characteristic of a growing Sincerity-complex in its practical current manifestations, will you read what John Benson said in a recent speech? The quotation is, you'll perceive, one from which this article as conducted so far might have been drawn:

As long as people discount advertising appeal as being partisan, one-sided, exaggerated, they will not use it as a buying guide. It may still serve to keep a product before them and make it acceptable; but it will not be convincing; nor can it create an adequate consumer demand. Conviction would be lacking.

You can thus see what the trend in copy appeal is likely to be. It MUST become more sincere, more informative, more helpful, and less partisan. Someone might ask: "Is partisanship not a necessary element in all advertising? Can it ever be eliminated? Is copy not a special plea for an individual product?" To be sure, it is. There is nothing public spirited about commerce. It seeks to make a profit. Advertising seeks to sell goods. But we must distinguish between means. What works in one era does not work in another. Confidence is the life of advertising. The more you expect from advertising, the more confidence it must enjoy. If in the future we have to go farther than consumer acceptance and create a definite demand, we must inject more conviction into advertising, and conviction depends upon sincerity and the facts. Advertising must help the consumer buy intelligently rather than seek to sell him.

"Sincerity and the facts," trumpets Mr. Benson—and gives us with the phrase both a ball-and-socket definition of "Sincerity" and a bedrock foundation for our prophecy. For, the more you study that nominal pair —"Sincerity and the facts"—the more you become convinced that these two agents are really one. Facts, of course, are always sincere—if they're not they aren't facts; and what is Sincerity but the simple process of

letting those facts talk? If, then, it is agreed that Advertising is placing more and more reliance upon facts—and a review of the extraordinary expansion of research, as well as study of the most successful current advertisements, can hardly fail to prove the supposition—Sincerity automatically crashes the gate. More facts, more Sincerity; more of the present dependence on facts, more Sincerity; more dependent-on-facts campaigns turned into visible profits, more Sincerity—that is the curve on which a prophecy of increasing Sincerity, that will become in time universal Sincerity, finds sure footing.

Is there testimony that this curve has already climbed beyond the blue-print stage? Space holds us down to but one witness though the court-room bristles with volunteers.

"It isn't very difficult," writes R. H. Eisenhardt in a recent magazine article,

"to select the campaigns that are sound. They are as refreshing as a breath of sea breeze. They are like substantial citizens—citizens with families at home—citizens genuinely interested in their jobs. They are not ballyhoo nor red paint. They are not obvious frauds nor untruthful. They do not resort to trickery and a whirlwind finish. They are honest, straightforward and sincere. They give as well as take. They play fair with the consumer. They help the dealer. They lay all the cards on the wholesaler's table. They give the advertiser a decent run for his money. They are ethical."

Sincerity and the facts—which is to say (if you'll put up with the unavoidable pun): Sincerity *ipso facto.* The major premise of our prophecy.

III

But this is a *professional* dissertation, written by a professional advertising copy man for professional advertising men. We aren't, either by nature or by habit, overfond of the generality. Suppose the outlook *is* toward a more stringent sincerity in advertising copy. Suppose we grant that the growing incursions of facts into the copy mean just that. Suppose we agree that the most durable and consistently profitable campaigns are the fact-campaigns. Suppose we rewrite the old adage to read, with Q. E. D. literalness, "The imitation of sincerity is the sincerest form of flattery"—and translate it, The copy of the future will be sincerely-factual and factually-sincere because that kind of copy pays the biggest dividends *today*. Is this as far as we need to go? What about the technical side? What about the *presentation* of this sincerity copy? That's rather vital, isn't it? A prophet doesn't work up much momentum on the back of even a thoroughbred generality. No, as advertising practitioners we must try to take our major premise apart, break it down into its elements, discover, if we may, how this general attribute is going to function, what the *aspect* of this copy of the future will be.

For obviously there are more possible aspects than one. In point of fact, *three* distinct general tendencies present themselves: all under the head of, and in conformance with, the ruling Sincerity motif. Observe, incidentally, that this Sincerity yardstick, though indispensable, is itself something of a variable as to *results*. Often, indeed, the more firmly we grasp it the more liable we are to get a mean splinter! For we must admit at the outset that, although copy that is not sincere will, in the long run, succumb to copy that is sincere, some copy that is sincere will outsell other copy equally sincere—in short, sincerity *alone* is not enough. That's a truism, of course; but it is restated here as a starting-point toward the consideration of what factors must be allied with sincere copy to make it also selling copy. Three trends, then, embodying this basic blend, all three equally sincere if not equally effective. Let's examine them in turn before underscoring the one that appears both most acceptable according to our theoretical analysis and most imminent in the light of present practice. In other words, the trend that requires no magic wand to turn it into prophecy.

First. The trend toward Differentness, if you will accept the word as legal tender. That "Something different" which is perhaps the most plaintive cry of the moment and certainly is the shrillest. But before we take a step, let's be sure we're marking time on the same square yard of principle. The Differentness that

may evince itself in the copy of the future will not be one which can be divorced from Sincerity—that is, if it's going to qualify for this prophecy. If you have followed the "prophet" thus far you will have realized that he cannot "see" insincere copy of any type making the grade ahead. Very well, then. But that by no means says that freshness, originality, daring imaginative twists—all the paraphernalia of Differentness—must be excluded, or even drastically subordinated to Sincerity. Let's agree right here—though without committing ourselves to this particular trend—that the cult of Differentness must be considered as a claimant to the copy throne of the future; but let's agree, also, that this Differentness must be harnessed with, though not cripplingly harnessed by, Sincerity. In other words, within the limits of an unswerving factual truthfulness, is the rage for that "Something different," for innovation, for the startling, bizarre or topsy-turvy presentation, destined to control the copy of tomorrow? For it could—yet be sincere. It could—yet not distort any facts. It could—but will it?

An advertisement appeared some time ago which is so effective an illustration of the passion for Differentness, which breaks so sweepingly with tradition, even to the employment of an advertisingly foreign language, that its insertion here has point. It was titled, ". . . always snifflin'," and ran:

You may think she's the original flat tire because she keeps tapping out time to her Black Bottom with a sniff-sniff here and a sniff-sniff there.

But Big Boy, hep yourself. Do you know what she says about you?

There, now—who kerchooed that time?

I *hope* you're well; but your blowout makes a baritone sax sound like Honolulu coming in over one tube.

Trouble about *always snifflin'* is that every false alarm who thinks the other bozo's sniffle sounds like h—— can't hear his own beak, even when it's clattering like loose brake bands on a Ford.

Let's not put any fancy names on this sniffling stuff. You can't Ritz a sniffle, so why try to give it a funny name?

Now here. Heads up on this. *Do you* sniffle? Sure you do. Ask your kid sister. Even your best friend will tell you. All right, then you need Rinex.

Who said so? You will, after you have filled in the coupon below and mailed it. Absolutely free, too.

Drag it blind with us. We will come across with a 24-hour sample treatment and you will know what it means to go through one night without waking yourself up about five times with the old "ha-pa-tooie."

Now get this—it's a sample. It's free. And just as true as those words are, is this—you probably need it. Listen to yourself for a day or so—while the sample is coming along!

Mail the coupon. If not for yourself, you know someone who *does* need it. Mail it for him—or her.

Now, this piece of copy would, no doubt, give Sinclair Lewis one of the creepy epidermic reactions of which he has recently complained. And the subject *isn't*

too pleasant. But is the presentation untruthful? Isn't the situation one that everybody is familiar with? And are there any extravagant or patently false claims? Doesn't the advertisement, in a word, reek with sincerity? Indeed, if ever a sales-talk polled honest, sales-building conviction, this one would appear to be elected; yet it's off the beaten path by a mile—virtually in unexplored territory. Within our prescribed limits, then, behold a prize specimen of Differentness!

We must face, therefore, the broad question: Is the search for novelty at any cost, save that of sincerity and of course decency, destined to sway the copy of tomorrow? For this specimen of what might be called the apotheosis of Slang merely *introduces* the possibilities of the Differentness trend. Other *genres* of Differentness could be worked out, each one pressing more and more audaciously toward the outer rim of continence and sobriety. In this connection Ray Giles's burlesque elliptical copy is recalled. Gertrude Stein's repetitious "monoliths" might be brought into the picture or e. e. cummings's parsimonious "pebbles." The sky would indeed be the limit. Some copy era, children! A newer, and ever more vortical, Modernism. The worship of Freakishness. Stuntism rampant. A copy department of mountain goats and contortionists. No advertisements that "derive" in the smallest degree, but all fresher than fresh, super-different, unique—though all invulnerably sincere!

Well, is it coming? Novelty-or-nothing? Let's beg off a categorical answer for the moment—merely noting, for what significance the lack of any widespread imitative follow-up may have, that the date of the "Always snifflin' " advertisement was April 16, 1927.

But again we've side-slipped into generalities. Again we remind ourselves that this is, or should be, a professional, a technical, investigation—based on continuing current phenomena and concerned with analyzable probabilities. "The Differentness trend visioned above," you may well object, "stresses merely the eccentric and the bizarre. What about the more temperate kind of Differentness that doesn't turn weird handsprings or leave the rails of usage and decorum to call attention to itself?—The Differentness which draws not from tricks, not from excursions into new modes, new dimensions and new definitions, but from the freshening-up of the *language* of the advertisement. Within the same limits of sincerity but also within the limits set by tradition and by common-sense, why can't a novel and different effect be achieved by displacing with new words and fresh images the venerable *clichés* and similes which clutter so much of the advertising of today?"

The point is, of course, well taken. So let's forget the aspect of Differentness which is just eccentricity and grotesquerie (thus, incidentally, answering our own question as to the future of this *n*th power variety

of the Differentness trend), and examine the trend as a practical technique-improver and vitality-restorer that might, as such, dominate the future of advertising copy.

Copy, then, that "goes in" for style, for a more "choosey" vocabulary, for exotic (though not affected) imagery, that creates a Differentness in texture rather than in form, in manner rather than in matter—is this to be tomorrow's product? Are we headed toward a higher refinement of the copy—not effeminacy, not florid and overblown writing, not mincing meticulousness, but a sufficiently virile, skillfully applied polish; a rigid avoidance of worn-out words and threadbare images and the substitution of the unusual word and the restrained "purple patch"; in short, a not too elaborate but nevertheless fastidious literary product.

The "No" to this question—for it is "No"—has too many little "Yeses" hanging on to it to be any hundred percenter. The negative wins, however, for reasons to be enlarged later. Skeletonized here, they are: Danger that the advertisement will become writing for writing's sake, that the selling will be lost sight of in the telling, that the reader will admire the setting and miss the stone: in brief, precisely the faults of any writing that elevates manner above matter, that attains Differentness by palpable *Effort*.—Not unusual words, then; not hothouse images; not obtrusive polish. But equally not banal *clichés* and motheaten figures of

speech. How our "No" can be mixed with enough "Yes," with regard to this "freshening" of the advertisement, so that we may create a desirable and practical Differentness will appear later.

(In this connection, let it not be forgotten that there's a parallel trend toward ultra, or at least conspicuous, refinement in some other parts of the engine of Advertising. All the color photography, handsome engraving, distinguished typography "slants" of the moment might easily "elevate" copy into a stilted, over-elegant product, from a not unnatural drift toward conformity. A danger here for the extremists to ponder!)

Let's drop, now, to the antithesis for our second possible trend. Simplicity. Bald, downright, naked simplicity. Nothing but the straight presentation of the facts. No images. No analogies. No adventitious "human interest." Just facts. The proponents of this school are impatient of anything that tends to cajole, to humor or to "inspire" the reader. They do not recommend, of course—since they're not insane—a mere table of merits. They will accept enthusiasm. They don't want dryness, tepidity, emasculation. They do want pace and vigor. But—facts, first, last and all the time. And (an inevitable corollary) a style that is as simple and forthright and unornate as are facts themselves. Since facts, they reason, are common things, homely things, everyday things, they should be displayed and sold in com-

mon, everyday words—not paraded in feathers and brocade.

No, again. But—also again—a No interpenetrated by little Yeses. One reason for the negative plurality is all that need be adduced: Simple copy, nude-facts copy, is usually *dull* copy. And dull copy isn't read.

IV

The copy of the future, then, it is submitted, will lie between these two extremes. On the one hand, Differentness in the sense of vital freshness and originality will not be ignored as an objective but it will not be secured by tricks with words or by flowers of imagery, however new and arresting; and on the other hand, Simplicity that tends to banality and dulness will be shunned. The ideal is Differentness without palpable Effort and Simplicity without reader Ennui. Or, expressed another way, the copy of tomorrow will aim at Simplicity with high distinctiveness (to borrow Roy Johnson's phrase), coupled with Differentness of low visibility (to make up one of our own). In the former attribute, Facts are primary but Salesmanship—which is Facts in lively motion—is not overlooked; in the latter attribute, Imagination is primary but Facts—which are Salesmanship intrenched—fortify the structure. In both, sincerity and truthfulness are firmly lodged. Remember, Simplicity alone may be dull;

Imagination alone may be lush. Facts alone won't sell, Differentness alone sells the writer's skill. A compromise, then, between our No. 1 and No. 2 trends emerges as Trend No. 3—the "prophecy" for the future of copy.

Is the compromise feasible? How is it to be accomplished? If not different words and expressions, what? How are we to freshen up copy unless we comb the Thesaurus? If we don't want hackneyed simplicity, how are we to avoid it, yet steer clear of those proscribed different words and expressions? How are we to sprout the wings of imagination without using aerial language? Are to go through the motions of flying with our feet on the ground? In short, can this ideal compromise be attained?

It's not easy. That's admitted. But there *is* a way between the strained or too highly colored Differentness which comes from killing off the musty old familiar words and similes, and the flat unarrestingness which comes from using them. A way to get rid of *clichés* without commandeering a vocabulary that overshoots the simple mind. A way to freshen up the language of copy without using any new or different words at all! It's a way that calls for work—harder and subtler work than thumbing Roget or Wilstach. But it's an eminently selling way, for it doesn't stop the reader, it doesn't make him feel *de trop;* and, particularly, it

doesn't shift his attention from the product to the advertisement.

The use of common words in uncommon combinations or with uncommon connotation will make those common words—as well as any images they may be charged with—*come alive:* that's as near perhaps as one can get to expressing what certainly can't be reduced to an inflexible formula. Nor, incidentally, is the forecaster required to hand out executive formulas. His job is really completed when he outlines the trend that he believes the future will reveal. Yet the How-it's-going-to-work-out is pertinent according to the "professional" definition already laid down—though if you let him get securely mounted on this hobby-horse he'll keep circling the track indefinitely. Briefly stated, his creed is that, within the obvious limits, say, of a Congoleum advertisement, which is addressed to an audience of millions, therefore to an unsophisticated audience; where the story is susceptible of little variety and the facts of none (except the inclusion of occasional manufacturing improvements); where, moreover, this message and these facts are repeated weekly throughout the year and have been for many years—freshness and originality may nevertheless be attained through the permutation method suggested, that takes the old language- and idea-factors and *transposes* them into something new, vital, memorable, without the addition of a single wholly new element.—A *genre* of work, as has

been hinted, that calls for the highest lapidary skill, though it usually wins the least applause. But it is a necessary, an indispensable, *genre* if our prophecy is sound and a middle way is really discernible between the Differentness that is unfamiliar and dissuasive, and the Simplicity that wearies and fails to take hold.

Into the actual mechanics of this middle way—this working and re-working of the old tried words into different combinations that will have all the impact of the unsafe innovation without its kick-back—it might seem gratuitous to go very far. Certainly it's nothing to dogmatize on. May we therefore sidestep an attempt at painful exposition, take a hint from *Strange Interlude,* and cut an imaginary slice of the future copy writer's time—a rambling soliloquy that will try to pick up and exemplify the major points of this forecast, including its "solution"? The copy writer is surveying with a frown a sentence he has just written:

"Then he redesigned the ——, finished it in colors, made it a thing of beauty."

Huh, that last clause is putrid. Don't suppose you could find a more decayed *cliché* in the whole of Bartlett. Maybe it meant something to Keats but it wouldn't any more, it's been so pawed over. How about "invested it with beauty"? Ump, too literary. Well, "bestowed on it beauty." A little better but "gave it beauty" simpler, therefore *much* better. Yes, but too simple, characterless, on the banal side. No *push* back of it! Start from here, however: at least we seem to be getting somewhere. "Lavished beauty on it": richer, more colorful, but

too much so; sounds highfalutin', too eloquent; besides, the tone is the tone of exaggeration. Well, then—ah: "touched it with beauty." Good pulling understatement and a new fresh image, just by using the verb with slightly unusual connotation—a common word in a less common guise.

Well, that's pretty fair. But let's try some other changes. "Made it something over whose beauty you can't help exclaiming!" Too many words, but sort of promising. "Something whose beauty makes you rave!" Ouch: saves words but is ridiculous. "Whose beauty makes you stop to say"—"whose beauty makes you stop to admire it"—nearer the right note but still cumbrous—wait a minute—"whose beauty stops you!" *There's* vigor, drama, too: and from the old trick of giving a different value to a common word by a little "inside" juggling. Two possible solutions, now.

Can I land a third? How about paraphrase? "Made it an exquisite thing." Nix—wornout adjective. Well, strike boldly afield. "Made it a 'Look-at-me-twice' thing." That's different! Yeh, but too different, has a smart-alecky sound, hard to read. Follow up this lead, though. "Made it charm the most casual eye." Not right yet: sounds a bit stilted; how about killing the adjective, a good thing generally. "Made it charm the eye"; pretty close, but "charm"—a trifle shopworn, isn't it? And aren't we getting down again rather near to a punchless simplicity? "Satisfy the eye, delight the eye"—hmn, no stronger than "charm." No emotional fire, no urge. "Rejoice," eh? "Rejoice the eye"—a little different use of the verb. . . . O.K. That clicks—but after all, perhaps, "touched it with beauty"—pretty decent balance, there, between nice poetic imagination and an unordinary simplicity—sounds kind of like the fairy godmother—well, there are three, anyhow. . . . I'll just sleep on 'em till tomorrow!